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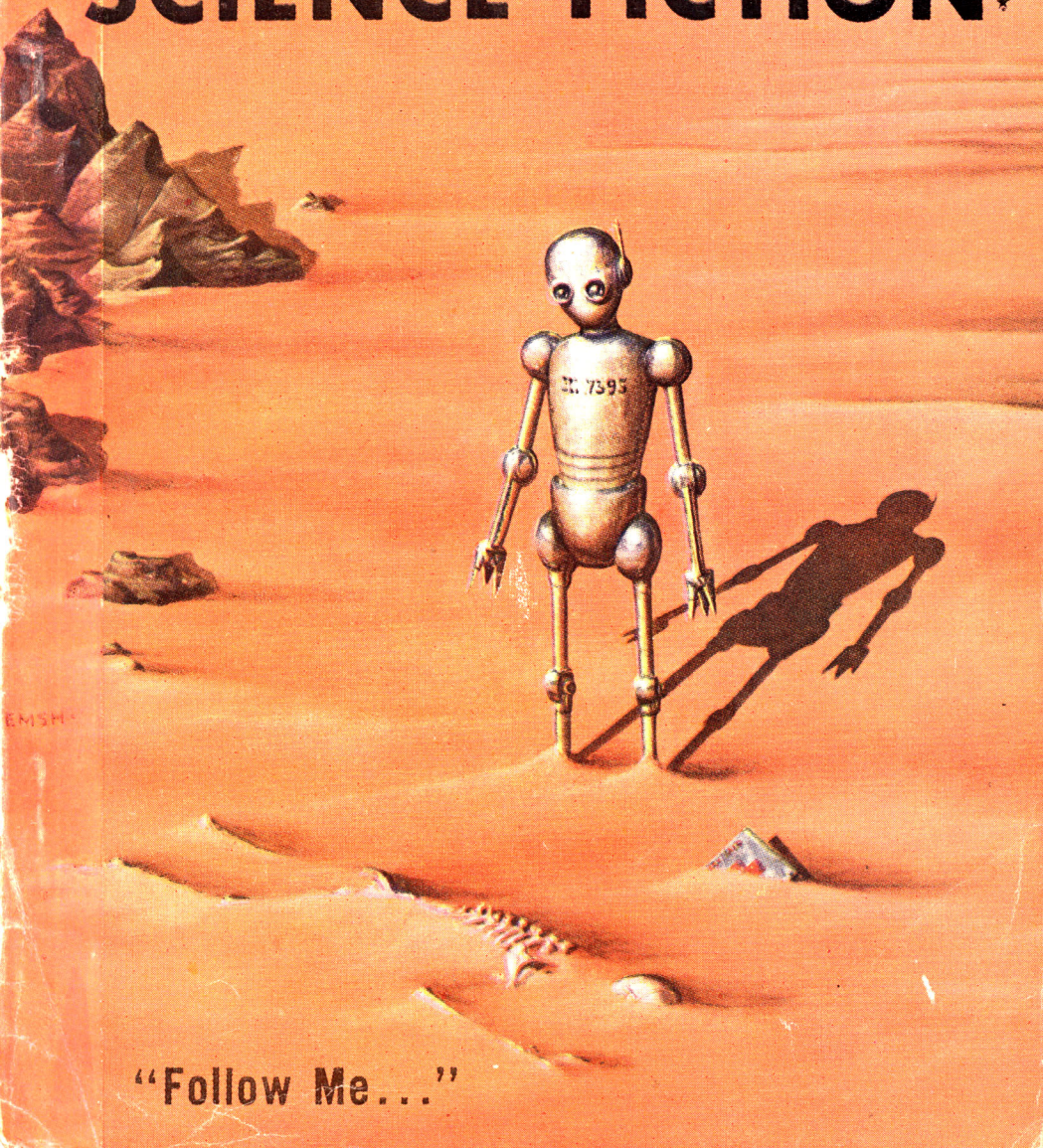

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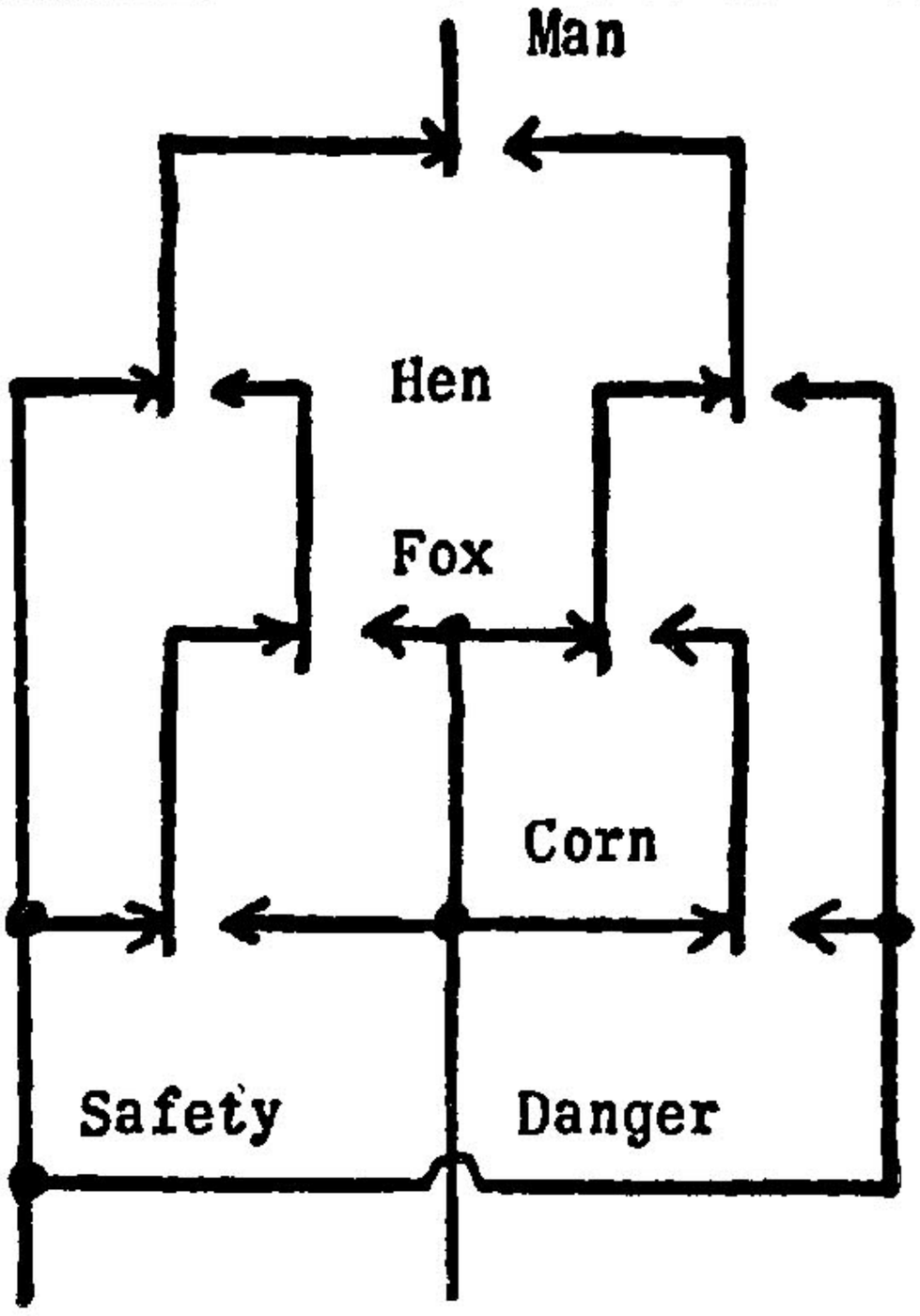

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ONE FULL CENTURY AGO, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., was founded by Francis S. Smith and Francis S. Street. In the hundred years since, Street & Smith has remained a family concern—something unique in this period of immense changes of cultural and economic forces.

On the evening of June eighteenth, Gerald Hewitt Smith, President of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of Astounding Science Fiction died. The Very Reverend John B. Coburn, Dean of Trinity Cathedral in Newark, his classmate, conducted the funeral services in Princeton, New Jersey on June 21, 1955. The following excerpt from Dean Coburn's prayer eloquently expressed the feelings of all of us who knew him:

"Loyal to the traditions of his heritage, he carried responsibilities with integrity, wisdom and faithfulness. Impatient only with cant and hypocrisy, he was long-suffering and of great goodness to those with whom he labored. Their problems were his, their sufferings he made his own, and their care his only concern. A multitude were blessed with his friendship, counsel and encouragement along the way, because it was his life he shared with them, willing to spend and be spent.

"There was no guile in him . . . only a spirit of utter simplicity within, a humility of heart, a quiet humor that never failed him and always helped us."

The Street & Smith family will carry on his interrupted work.

THE SHORT LIFE

The Alien had to choose—and fast—a living entity to act through. He chose . . . but he made one error . . .

BY FRANCIS DONOVAN

Illustrated by Rogers

I

An embryo stirred very slightly in the warm, dark womb that held it. Chemical stimuli and minute pulses of energy that were forming the complex proteins faltered. A catalyst failed briefly in its task, then resumed, but the damage had been done. A vital circuit remained incomplete, a neural path blocked. Time passed . . .

An embryo gathered in a metal

womb, controlled potential building to titanic birth. A thread of wire melted under a breath of energy and a tiny, glowing light winked out. A rodentlike maintenance robot, scurrying to an unimportant repair task, saw no warning signal and crossed a control panel from behind at the moment that a relay closed automatically. Obliterated, the robot only briefly interfered with the proper functioning of the machine, but the damage had been done. For a split second at a critical moment, a mighty engine reacted out of control. Time passed . . .

An embryo jerked convulsively under a frightful onslaught, strained for life in a crowded womb while the mother's convulsions threatened it with death. The convulsions passed, the mother lived, the womb emptied, but the damage had been done, a record had been cut. Time passed . . .

II

There are logical limits for any pretense—limits beyond which the pretense becomes demonstrably absurd. Mother-love enabled the woman Helen Douglas to evade logic up to and beyond the point of absurdity, but even mother-love is not proof against the turmoil of the subconscious. A survival factor pried up a safety valve, and Helen Douglas found herself suddenly face to face with the admission that she had so desperately suppressed. She reacted with a terrible storm of weeping that shook the bed and was watched with complete disinterest by the dry-eyed imbecile beside her. Two-year-old Timothy Wainwright Douglas, congenital idiot, couldn't care less. It was nothing to him that his mother had at last faced the ugly knowledge that her only child should have been born dead. It was less than nothing to him that she could almost find it in her heart to wish him dead.

Release from the crowded womb brought no immediate awakening from the long sleep of gestation, for a sense of identity comes only slowly to the very young, the new-born. He did not realize that his intellectual awakening, gradual as it seemed to him, was really extraordinarily rapid, a matter of only two or three weeks after birth. To him, with no frame of reference, it was a time of mystery that was not recognized as mystery. At first there was only Warmth and Hunger, for which he had no names but which he recognized by their presence or absence. There was the satisfying of Hunger, Sleep, and the return of Hunger. Had he been inclined to philosophy at that tender age, he would have considered the cycle a complete and satisfying one. In a few days, however, there were longer periods between the satisfying of Hunger and the coming of Sleep—a sort of comfortable, full-stomached reverie that was the beginning of the end.

With astounding precocity of which he was completely unaware,

he began rapidly sorting and cataloguing noises that had previously conveyed no meaning. He now learned to associate certain sounds with certain sources and place others under tentative listings while awaiting further data. Smells received the same treatment as noises and often the two could be related. A certain smell and a certain gobbling sort of noise were often followed by a frightening swoop as he was lifted, but his eyes were not yet focused and could give him little information as to the manner or purpose of lifting.

In his fourth week of life he began to be troubled. His little handful of memories centered around a growing and not entirely subjective awareness of himself as an individual. Clearly, life could be divided into "me" and "not me." To have arrived at that conclusion twenty-odd days after birth was an incredible achievement. His mind was quick, but it could not reason further without a basis for logic, a system of reference, learned data from which further data could be inferred. There was uneasiness in him, but no warning of danger; only a stirring of memory that tried to rise to the conscious level. Wonderingly he prodded the memory a little, as an inquisitive child pokes at a slow-burning firecracker or a wary pup approaches its first cat. Like the sharp crack of a squib, the quick spit of a cat, the memory erupted and flung him back on his mental heels.

He felt a sensation that he knew was death though he had no name for it, and his immature defenses sprang into action, tried in vain to block the memory, to thrust Death back into its Pandora's Box. He impeded the flood by an infinitesimal fraction of a second, and then full awareness came and with it an understanding of the terrible thing that had happened, the thing that—he?—yes, *he* had done.

The fledgling identity of "me" and "not me" sank forever into submergence, never to rise again.

III

When he was almost four, Timmy spoke his first words. He said clearly and matter-of-factly, "I want that one, Helen."

His mother's mouth slowly opened while her face turned gray with shock. The buckling of her knees in cataplexy forced her to sit down heavily on a kitchen chair not cushioned for such descents, but she was hardly aware of it. Timmy, seated on the kitchen floor and surrounded by half-grown pups owned by a neighbor, screwed his head around to glance at her impatiently over his shoulder.

"I want that one," he repeated confidently, and pointed to the most ill-proportioned of an ill-conceived litter of mongrels. Helen raised shaking hands to her face, and screamed.

The quick scrape of a chair in the living room and the sound of hasty footsteps glissading on the throw-

rug in the hall heralded the approach of Timmy's father. The doorway filled with flexing muscles that flexed in vain, but somewhat at a disadvantage by the strictly static tableaux. Helen sat at the table, her staring eyes fixed on the child who looked back in blank astonishment. Even the pups were motionless, having cowered in alarm at Helen's scream.

"What's the matter?" Timmy's father asked.

His voice was a spur rudely galvanizing her into action, into an awkward convulsion that landed her on her knees beside Timmy. She gripped his little shoulders with fierce intensity and almost glared into his eyes.

"Say it again, Timmy—*say it again!*" She looked around wildly. "He spoke, Jerry, as clear as anyone! He said 'I want that one,' and pointed! Timmy . . . darling . . . *angel* . . . say it again!"

Timmy's face twitched uncertainly, giving the effect of a confused play of expressions. For a moment he looked as though he would cry, but then the crumpled, puckered lines magically smoothed. The eyes, dull and blank, stayed dry. He made a senseless noise and slobbered in doing so. His jaw was slack, his chin wet.

Jerry felt slightly sick.

"Get up, Helen." He lifted her somewhat roughly to her feet, overrode her babble. "You're frightening the . . . the child."

"He *talked,* Jerry . . . you heard him! *Didn't* you hear him!"

"Come in the living room and sit down." She was half-carried, her protests ignored. There was a certain grim determination in his actions as he made her comfortable. "Now we're going to face it, Helen. It can't be put off. Timmy was heartwrenching enough by himself, but I've had to watch the change in you in the past few months. You're getting . . . well, we'll call it hysterical. I could cut off my arm for saying this, honey, but, if we keep Timmy any longer, you'll just have a breakdown, that's all!"

She moaned softly, rocking back and forth in misery's timeless attitude. "I can't help it, Jerry. I . . . just . . . can't . . . help it."

"I know, I know. So I'm making the decision for both of us, here and now, and on my head be it. Timmy will have to be put away this week, permanently."

"No!" Her wail was more of anguish than of protest.

"Yes! I can't stand coming home from work day after day to find you've manufactured some new evidence to delude yourself there's hope for him. One day he took the spoon in his hand to feed himself, another day he focused his eyes and looked around the room as though he was really taking everything in—"

"You said you believed me!"

"So I did—at first. So I'd sit around all evening watching him, *willing* him to do something intelligent. And did he? No. Hon, I don't want to be unkind to you or to him,

but I can't stand seeing you delude yourself, making yourself sick. We've both taken more than is good for us. We're at the end of our rope. We've got to face it now and do what should have been done long ago. It's not as if Timmy will miss us. He doesn't even know us, after four years!"

She gathered her forces, shut her eyes tight as if to deny his existence. "It's no use, Jerry, I won't do it. I am *not* deluding myself. I heard him speak. If that was illusion, it was so real to me that you may as well put us both away together!"

"Hysterical hallucinations—"

"Jerry, don't say that again. *I heard him say 'I want that one, Helen.'*"

"You see! Already you're embroidering what you heard! Now he's calling his mother by her first name. Honest, Helen, can't you see how ridiculous you're being? If you'd thought he said da-da or goo-goo I could have gone along with the gag, but to have him jump the whole learning stage and come out with a complete, concise, explicit little sentence ending familiarly with your Christian name—"

"I don't know how he did it, but he *did* it."

Jerry rose from his seat beside her, his lips tight. "I can't honestly say I love my own child, hard as I've tried. But I can say that I love his mother. If I have to bankrupt myself to give Timmy proper care in an institution, then I'll do just that, and do it gladly. But I won't falsely place his interests above yours. He was born an idiot and he will live and die an idiot. Nothing can change that. Timmy goes, and that's final."

He clamped his mouth shut and turned toward the kitchen where he knew his son sat, a stupid lump that couldn't even crawl of its own volition. The stupid lump stood firmly in the doorway, an uncertain, placating smile on its lips, a pup cradled in the slender arms.

"Jerry? I want *this* one."

IV

By Timmy's sixth birthday, only his parents' adamant attitude had saved him from becoming a side show. Once the initial household uproar had died down and some degree of general sanity been restored, Helen and Jerry had another bad fright. They had grudgingly allowed Clancey, the family sawbones, to call in a psychologist friend, Philip Warwick. The combined efforts of these two to find an explanation for Timmy resulted in complete chaos, with Timmy suffering violent and erratic lapses into complete idiocy for varying lengths of time. Standard tests meant nothing, unless mutually exclusive results could be accepted as meaningful in themselves. At length, Timmy suffered a relapse of such duration that the parents became panic-stricken and quietly rebelled. It was obvious that he needed an atmosphere of peace and quiet. Confusion, excitement, or the concentrated attention of several

adults simply threw him into a relapse.

The break came when Clancey called at the house and found it empty, deserted. He traced them to a new neighborhood where they had rented a house with a peaceful, walled garden. They were not pleased to see him, but Clancey was a psychologist of sorts himself and a working agreement was arrived at whereby he and Warwick could drop in frequently as friends and quietly observe Timmy, chatting with him when they could win his confidence and submitting him to whatever tests they could adequately disguise. But under pain of permanent excommunication from the Douglas menage they were not to discuss him with outsiders in such a way as to either identify him or draw attention to him. Timmy was to be allowed to set his own pace under their obliquely-watching eyes. He was not to become a subject for newspaper comment, for the speculation of strangers, or for the heated discussion of learned gentlemen calling each other liars in six syllables. For Timmy was something new under the sun.

Two years of observation gave Clancey and Warwick an impressive file of notes on him, and they were prone to sit after office hours with it on the desk between them, giving it morose glances. They were not happy. Sometimes, as now, they concluded an evening visit by sitting in Clancey's or Warwick's car parked outside the Douglas fence, holding an impromptu post-mortem on an intellectual corpse that had come to life in complete defiance of all the rules. They didn't notice the stealthy movement of one of the fenceboards, nor the small form that snaked through the shadows of concealing shrubbery until it was near the open window of the car.

"Take word-association, Clancey. I had a few minutes with him this evening before you got here, so I started him on a 'game' where we took turns in saying a word and trying to guess what the other would reply. I believe he thought I was rather a simpleton and needed humoring. Anyway, I tried him with 'home' and got a delayed response. It's happened before. Apparently the concept of home is tied to some deeper disturbance." There was a slight, uneasy movement from the listening figure. "Well, linking home and family, on my next turn I shot 'mother' at him. There was an immediate flash of confusion in his eyes and again a delayed response before he blurted 'Mom.' Something else had been on the tip of his tongue, but he choked it back and selected what seemed to him a more suitable reply.

"Now, we both know from two years' systematic observation that Helen is as well-balanced a mother as you're likely to find. I'm quite sure she has no unsuspected bad habits or traits that are leaving sensitive spots in Timmy's mind, making him flinch at the association, nor is there some long-standing or unresolved

conflict in their relations. Yet 'home' and 'mother' both invoke blocks that inhibit response until consciously overcome, or invoke images that he wishes to conceal lest they betray a secret. I doubt very much whether anything that happened in his first four years could have left a deep impression on the completely imbecilic mind he is *assumed* to have had then. That leaves the past two years—"

(*Confirmation*) *Game/not game . . . Should data have predicted test?* (*Indecision*) *Possibly . . . review later. So much to learn . . . confusion inevitable. Next time respond "mother—three"* (*laughter*) *Invalid frame of reference—impossible work with/discard.*

"Something else interests me there, Phil. You suggest he selected, deliberately, what seemed an appropriate response to 'mother.' Did you take the next logical step and try 'father?' "

"Yes."

"And did he anticipate it?"

"I'm sure he did. I see what you mean . . . fairly sharp reasoning for a six-year-old supposed to be mentally retarded. When I shot 'father' at him he came back promptly with 'male-Douglas' almost like one word."

"Got the sex and identity right. What's wrong with that?"

"There's nothing 'wrong' or 'right' about it. I was hoping for some clue as to how his mind works. Maybe I got it, but I don't know what to do with it. I didn't expect a calmly objective cataloguing of the old man as a 'male-Douglas.' "

(*Surprise*) *Where is error? Semantics? Sociology? Colloquial nuance?* (*Decision*) *Reject further word-games.*

"If that's a clue, Phil, you can have it." Clancey hauled a notebook from his pocket and held it up. "Open this thing anywhere—anywhere at all. It'll open at an unanswered question. At the age of roughly three and one-half, a congenital idiot suddenly displays flashes of alert intelligence. For forty-two months that child was content to sit on his fanny and vegetate. Never crawled, never spoke, never played, seldom even focused his eyes. Then one day his mother sees him study some alphabet blocks with every appearance of curiosity. Awareness! For the first time!

"Later, he suddenly reaches out his hand and piles the blocks in a neat stack. Purposeful activity and perfect muscular control! No trial-and-error, no baby hesitation with hand poised—just a sudden assured, controlled action. Mama leaps for joy, junior relapses into idiocy, and no one—including me—really believes mama when she says it happened. This sort of thing goes on for several months—brief, erratic flashes of extraordinary intelligence, considering the subject. Then, a child who has never spoken a single

word says clearly and politely, 'I want that one, Helen,' and a child who has never crawled puts his feet under him and stands up steady as a rock. You tell me, Phil—how did he do it?"

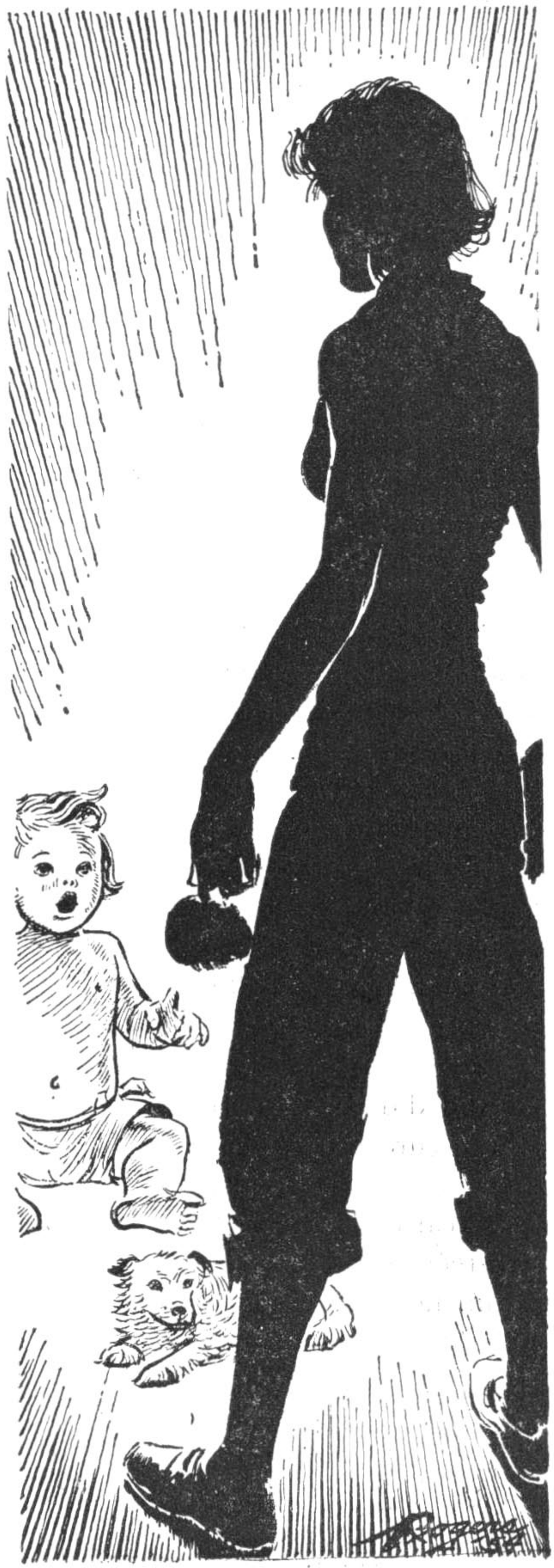
"Don't look to me for an answer. I'm only a lousy fifth-rate psychology teacher, as of the day you brought Timmy into my life. And the curse of Freud be on you for *that* kindly act of professional assassination. The answer is obvious, of course . . . Timmy didn't and couldn't do what we've seen him do with our own wide-open, innocent eyes. We are the victims of a cunning hoax."

(*Amusement*) *Difficult to experiment unobserved. Action too precipitate/no choice.* (*Affection/laughter*) *"The world is so people."* (*Chill*) *Danger! Madness!*

"How does any child learn to speak?"

"Mainly by hearing others. Maybe Timmy learned the same way. Maybe he listened, absorbing the meaning and sound of words, trying them out in the silence of his otherwise vacant little noggin. Maybe his mind awakened gradually to the realization that it was a prisoner in a paralyzed organ, strait-jacketed by blocks or short circuits. Maybe he spent his forty-two months of vegetating driving against those blocks until he partially broke them down and could speak. Maybe."

"And without ever having shaped his lips or tongue to intelligent



sounds, he speaks fluently at the first try?"

"Why not? Any kid that will start out by addressing its parents chummily as 'Helen' and 'Jerry' and act naively surprised at the reaction, obviously has rules of its own."

They ruminated in silence for a moment.

"It's too easy to talk vaguely about blocks and short circuits, Clancey. How do you account for his completely erratic progress? Totally unpredictable, with alternating periods of complete idiocy and high intelligence?"

"Not totally unpredictable."

"Oh?"

"At least three things suggest a pattern. One is that his relapses, though erratic, are becoming ever shorter in duration and more widely separated."

"Yes, they are infrequent now and quickly ended."

"The second is that his grasp of the social pattern in which he lives —his environment, in all its subtleties —is constantly improving."

"Right again. At the age of six he can in many ways match a bright lad twice his age. Not in the subtleties, though—I disagree there. You can give him a simple or even a not-so-simple explanation of something he hears on the radio, dealing with it as a general theme in sociology, and he seems to grasp the broad outline with little difficulty, but in trivial matters of social behavior and human relations he's frequently uncertain, as likely as not to pull a howling bloomer. Seems unusually baffled and exasperated by some of the social mores he runs into, such as the many tabu subjects for conversation, or taking your clothes off whenever or wherever you feel inclined to. Poor Helen. She tries to explain and he keeps doggedly after her with ruthless logic, obviously trying hard to understand, and . . . you know . . . it's surprising how few really sound, logical reasons there are for half the accepted conventions that rule our lives.

"He's pinned me down several times to the conclusion that a certain convention exists solely because people can't be trusted to behave rationally without restraining rules. It's rather a dismaying conclusion when it's dragged out in the open like that, and it seems to horrify him. An ordinary kid learns by experience and accepts the rules with sporadic rebellion, but our boy acts as if they were beyond comprehension. And I think they are . . . to him.

"The first crime drama he happened to see on TV turned him white as a sheet, and when he stuck his nose out the gate a few days later and watched some neighborhood kids playing cowboys and Indians with cap pistols, he was sick on the grass. Explaining the 'glamour' of the early west made it worse. He drew back from me as though I were contagious. I had the feeling that he *pitied* me. I wonder, sometimes, whether he makes any real sense at all out of what is said to him. He's very slow to interpret the shades of

expression possible in voice and face. I feel that potentially he has an exceptional mind, but the great difficulty is communication."

"Like pulling his leg. It's too easy to be fun."

"Exactly, unless the little so-and-so is pulling ours, which I sometimes suspect." Phil winced a little and rubbed his hand across his forehead. "Getting a headache. Well, what's this third item you had in mind?"

"I can't pin it down, but I have a feeling there's a fairly obvious physical factor linking the periods of relapse."

"Physical tiredness?"

"No . . . the contrary, perhaps. At the start he got himself overtired pretty often, as though he overestimated his endurance, but it didn't seem to do him any harm. But if he awakens early or unexpectedly, there may be an appreciable delay before he orients himself. Then he comes to with a snap."

"Shock? Confusion of any sort?"

"Confusion, certainly. He didn't last five minutes when they tried him in school, you remember. Howled for his dog, then sat on the floor and dribbled. The confusion of being chucked into a group of noisy, aggressive six-year-olds was too much for him. You remember he recovered completely—almost instantly—when his mother packed him out of the school."

"That reminds me of something else. I think that dog is some sort of a symbol to him. Perhaps it has somehow become associated with security. Try this for size: his mind is struggling to free itself from its strait jacket; the dog captures his attention at a critical moment; the mother screams when he speaks, frightening him, but the dog comes reassuringly to his arms and subsequently—or did *he* see it as a consequence?—his parents make much of him. In other words, at the start of his rational life the dog is a friendly element and the parents a frightening one. The details of the association drop soon enough from his conscious memory, but not from his subconscious. When the dog is with him, he feels secure. When they are separated—it was not allowed into school with him, of course—his symbol is gone and he panics, much as an ordinary child panics if it loses its mother in a crowd."

"Slick, but not convincing. It touches on another peculiarity, however . . . the way he wants that hound with him always, no matter where. Sleeps with it on his bed, eats with it by his chair, even takes it to the bathroom—by-the-by, he acquired the dog and bowel-control at the same time, if you recall—but does he *like* the dog? He never pets it to speak of. Plays with it sometimes in a clumsy, disinterested sort of way, but it's not the classic boy-dog relationship. If the dog is merely a symbol, as you suggest—"

"I didn't say 'merely' a symbol. If I'm right, an association as strong as this one could be devilish awk-

ward and even dangerous, hooked to a hair-trigger mind like his. What if something happens to the dog before his dependence or whatever can be broken? Dogs get run over, you know, and even their normal life span is short. Maybe we ought to try to break it up . . . damn this headache."

(Regret/Despondency) Degraded to pain . . . static/thick tongue. (Resignation) Delay, delay, delay . . . break conversation. Time wrong.

"You been bothered with headaches lately?"

"Off and on—nasty sort of twinges. If I trusted myself with a carpenter, I'd let you give me a check-up. Well, let's cut this short. What I was going to say . . . let's see . . . oh, since Timmy seldom pays any attention to the dog, why does the dog stick to him like a shadow?"

Clancey grunted.

"That dog's no fool, stupid as he is. Clumsy, homely, and half-witted enough to sit on a tack for five minutes before he howled—I've seen him do just about that—he knows when he needs a protector. If it weren't for Timmy, the hound would have been destroyed long ago as an act of mercy. Helen and Jerry are resigned to him, of course, for Timmy's sake, but have you noticed that the dog reacts much the same as Timmy if they get separated? Casts about at once for a way to rejoin him, and the longer he's delayed the more he panics. Maybe it's a two-way switch—maybe Timmy and his dog are indispensable symbols to each other!"

"You dream up any more lulus like that, you keep them to yourself. Psychopathic dogs I draw the line at. Clancey, there is only one conclusion to be drawn from these here solemn deliberations. Throw out the textbooks and roll with the punches."

"Amen."

V

"There should be no deaths!"

Phil turned that one over in his mind, cautiously. A good deal of his attention was needed for the task of nursing his old car along the ruts of the dirt road, but the murmured exclamation impelled him to steal a glance at the boy sitting beside him. This was the spring of Timmy's tenth year—the sixth year of his friendship with "Uncle" Phil—and those years had taught Phil more than he realized, if less than he had hoped. He knew, for example, that the peculiar vacancy of Timmy's expression at the moment implied deep thought rather than the complete absence of thought that it suggested. That was a curious characteristic that always made the man a little uneasy. Timmy's face was sometimes radiantly, spontaneously expressive, the most sensitive of mirrors, and sometimes it was rather mechanically expressive, but it was only expressive in a positive sense. In moments of abstraction or daydreaming there was

no faraway look, no frown of concentration. Only blankness.

"The world would get a trifle crowded, you know."

Timmy leaped the gap easily to connect the two remarks, as Phil had thought he would. "Oh, I didn't mean there should be no *death*. I was thinking of something else. That man they found dead in the bush yesterday."

"A man with a heart condition should never go hunting alone."

"Was it his heart, Uncle Phil?"

"His heart and his head both, if you ask me. He had a bad heart, all right—I saw him have an attack once. You'd think a man like that would have sense enough to avoid overexertion, but he lost his way and started churning through swamp and brush in a straight line instead of looking for the trail again. Must have acted like a moron, running until he dropped."

"Would panic make a man do that?"

"It will make a man do any crazy thing imaginable, if he lets it get the upper hand. There's only a few square miles of marsh and brush here, with the town already crowding up against it. In a few years it will be drained and the land used for industrial development and so on, then the fools will have to find some other way to kill themselves."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, every so often we have to turn out search parties and have a grand shivaree looking for some idiot who usually turns up dead. Drowned himself in two feet of water, or run himself ragged, or even put a bullet through his head for no good reason. It's happened several times in the past few years, so the place is getting a bad name it doesn't deserve. Even the search parties often get themselves balled up and mill around in circles, perfect examples of mass hysteria. Sometimes I get fed up with the human race."

"I . . . didn't know. I mean, about the . . . deaths."

Phil laughed outright at the tragic tone.

"Oh, come now! Let's not be morbid about it! You wanted to drive out here, remember."

"I still do, Uncle Phil. You and Dad were talking about how you used to come out here every spring when you were kids, to collect specimens, and it sounded like fun."

"So it was . . . in those days. This old dirt road leads well in toward the center. I used to spend a whole day hiking along here with my dog, just rooting around and having a grand time. It's a pity we outgrow the best things in life. Childhood scenes should be remembered, not revisited. We can remember, but we can't recapture. A few years ago I wanted some nature photographs so of course I came out here, sure I'd get some beauties. I don't know. I started out in high spirits, recognizing every rotted old stump along the way, but somehow it all turned to ashes. I lost interest and turned back without taking a single expo-

sure—almost hating the place, in fact, as if it had let me down. Strange that a place I loved as a kid should seem so empty and uninviting now." He put on the brakes and looked around morosely.

"Don't you want to go any farther, Uncle Phil?"

"What for? You can see how overgrown the road is getting. I'll be lucky if I can find a clearing to turn around. There's nothing of interest up ahead, Timmy. The road dies out and then there's a couple of miles or so of swamp and flies. It's getting dusk, too—"

"I'd like to get out for a minute."

"Oh. Well, O. K., but make it snappy."

He settled back listlessly as the boy climbed out, holding the door for the dog to follow.

"Do you have to take that mutt . . . never mind, go ahead."

The boy wandered off to the side of the road and Phil listened to the rustle of bushes, wondering at his own irritation. He felt ill at ease, anxious to be away. He started as Timmy came up beside him on the left of the car.

"That was quick."

"Yeah." The boy was holding a spray of flowering shrub and his hand passed casually over the flowers in a light caress. "Say, hasn't this flower got a sweet smell, Uncle Phil? Here, smell it."

"It's a pretty flower, Timmy, but that stuff has no perfume." He accepted the branch automatically, lifted it to his nostrils.

Time stopped.

He thought he felt a thump against the side of the car, but the impression faded before it was fully born. In a remote corner of his mind the ticking of his watch sounded as a cold, measured rhythm, a metronome with delusions of syncopation. He sat motionless, his forearm resting on the steering wheel, the spray of blossoms caressing his cheek, his mind stunned by the anaesthetic he drew in with each breath. He was as one lost in thought, his eyes open but unseeing, observing but not interpreting.

There was no sense of duration, of the passage of seconds or minutes. There was only a dream in which, suddenly, a gentle mind made its presence known. Concepts tapped lightly at his own mind and an automatic process of interpretation winnowed and equated until a gentle voice seemed to speak. The words were few, merely computed associations keyed to understanding, and with them were perfectly and intimately synchronized fragments of emotion and vision, softly washing over the surface of his mind.

(Urgency) Attend—attend! Challonari! Attend!

An impression of convolutions drifted through his mind—a shape, perhaps, and a color. He felt no curiosity, and let the impression drift. As a sunbather drowsing on

a crowded beach, hearing the background hum of the crowd and now and then a more clearly spoken phrase, so he caught the edge of this communication. It was not for him. A second mind entered . . . *was* it a mind? Yes, and yet very different. It was strong, but limited —perhaps childlike, in some ways. Alive after a fashion, it was reactive of emotion up to a point and even capable of emotion—up to a point. It seemed an embryo mind, in some ways well developed and in others with no potential whatever.

(RELIEF) IDENTITY BLURRED . . . KNOW/NOT KNOW. (PERPLEXITY) NO PRECEDENT . . . REQUIRE INSTRUCTIONS. (CONFIDENCE / TRUST) INSTRUCT PLEASE.

Instructions (*Decisive*) *Sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep.*

(AGITATION) IDENTITY NOT MENTOR . . . INSTRUCTIONS INVOLVE BASIC DISOBEDIENCE (CONFUSION/DISTRESS) CANNOT OBEY/DISOBEY . . . DILEMMA INSOLUBLE TO CHALLONARI (PLEADING) REVISE INSTRUCTIONS PLEASE.

(*Sorrow*) *Cannot revise. Identity mentor/not mentor. Challonari must obey identity.*

(GREAT AGITATION) ACCEPT IDENTITY MENTOR/NOT MENTOR . . . CANNOT RECONCILE BASIC CONFLICTS . . . CANNOT OBEY/DISOBEY (SUDDEN HOPE) LOGICAL DIVERGENCE PERMISSIBLE . . . SIMPLIFY EXPLANATION PLEASE.

(*Reluctance/hesitation*) *Intelligent identities here . . . unable communicate . . . Challonari. Result . . . so.* (*Pain*) *Communication . . . so.* (*Wave pattern*).

(UNHESITATING) ILLOGICAL/REJECT . . . COMMUNICATION DESCRIBED IMPOSSIBLY LIMITED . . . INCONSISTENT/-HIGH-LEVEL INTELLIGENCE.

Challonari limited . . . must accept. (*Command*) *Challonari sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep.*

(EXTREME AGITATION) CANNOT/MUST OBEY.

(*Command/pity*) *Challonari has destroyed intelligence! Must sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep!*

(AGONY . . . HORROR/CONFLICT . . . INSANITY).

Challonari! (*No response. Grief*) *Ultimate withdrawal . . . Challonari! Challonari!*

Phil frowned, looking at his empty hand. It seemed to him that the spray of flowers had inexplicably vanished. There was an elusive sense of disorientation, a feeling of something overlooked. There was the tag-end of a remembered grief. There was—

"You were right, Uncle Phil. They have no scent."

"What?" He looked around blankly, saw Timmy tossing the spray aside. "Oh . . . there it is. I thought I . . . uh . . . forget what I was going to say." Two voices that

were not voices—a dream, a despairing cry. An elusive memory faded, faded. "There's mud on your cheek, Timmy. Did you fall?"

"No . . . that is, yes." Timmy scrubbed his cheek industriously.

"Make up your mind. Hurt yourself?"

"No, I'm all right."

"Well, whip around to the other side and hop in." Phil watched him in the rear-view mirror and noted the hasty dab at moist eyes. It seemed like a significant giveaway, but he couldn't imagine why. "Get your mutt in and let's go."

"Come on, Homer." The boy settled himself with his dog between his feet, and Phil laughed, his good spirits returned. He turned the car without much trouble and they bumped back over the wagon ruts.

"Why do you call him Homer, Timmy?"

"Well, on account of the Odyssey, you know."

"I see. Some day when I have a clear mind and a couple of hours to spare, you can explain the connection between Homer's Odyssey and a flea-bitten semi-airdale."

They rode in silence for a while, until the dirt road changed to pavement. Phil let his thoughts wander idly, thinking of nothing in particular. Scraps of this and that seemed to float to the surface and drift out of reach before he could capture them, had he been interested in trying. One fragment somehow caught in an eddy and remained in sight long enough to draw his attention.

"Challonari," he said, wonderingly, and almost ditched them as stabbing pain shot through his temples. He held the wheel with one hand, the other clapped for a moment to his brow. "Don't do that!" he snapped angrily.

"W-what, Uncle Phil?"

"Sorry, Timmy, I didn't mean you. I don't know who I meant . . . or, rather, *what* I meant, of course. I seem to be pretty confused tonight. I even startled poor old Homer with that swerve. Get his muddy feet off the cushions, Timmy." Homer sank back obediently to his usual place between Timmy's feet, but his muzzle rested on the boy's muddied knees and his brown eyes regarded both of them at the same time. Apparently he was not convinced that the upheavals were over.

"What does 'challonari' mean, Uncle Phil?"

"Oh . . . that. Just something that came to mind."

"But what does it mean?"

"I don't really know, Timmy . . . something about convolutions or a convoluted shape, I think, but that's only part of it. There are connotations of . . . of intelligence? No . . . ridiculous. How can you have a convoluted intelligence? But a brain is convoluted and to a greater or lesser degree intelligent. The . . . um . . . the question of degree comes into it, I think. A brain of limited intelligence, then, though damned if I know why I think of it as limited. Challonari . . . challonari. It's not English and it doesn't sound like a

technical word, but I must have heard it in connection with something . . . quite recently, too."

"Sort of rhymes with 'shivaree.'"

"Only sort-of, Timmy. You wouldn't make a good poet. Shivaree —challonari. I mentioned shivaree when we were talking about people getting lost in the bush, didn't I? Did it have some connection with that? But how?"

"Maybe a sort of—mental trick?"

"Mental association rings a bell. Mental . . . no, it's gone . . . wait. Teacher, trainer, instructor—a brain of limited intelligence would need a teacher. Gentle teacher. Why gentle, for Pete's sake? But teacher and pupil, that seems almost right. How much can one word mean? What am I trying to recall, anyway? The meaning of a word? The *associations* connected with a word? The association of ideas? Blast it, this is more than tantalizing."

"Like when you wake up knowing you've had a dream, but you can't remember any of it?"

"Uh . . . yes, like a dream. A dream of—" The blood drained from his face, leaving him gray and ashen. Timmy put out a hand in alarm, to steady the wheel.

"Uncle Phil!"

"It's all right, Tim. It . . . it's all right. I had a thought there that kind of shook me." He relaxed with a shaky laugh, relief flooding his face once more with color. "What a crazy thought! I could have sworn . . . well, never mind. But it shakes a man to learn what tricks his own mind can play on him, all in an instant."

"What kind of tricks, Uncle Phil?"

"Oh, no you don't. If you hadn't egged me on with so many questions, I'd have been spared a pretty nasty moment, you know that? Now let me concentrate on driving for a change so I can get you home in time for supper. O. K.?"

"But . . . oh, O. K."

"Don't sound so disappointed, chum. It's been a pleasant drive, even if nothing much happened."

"Yes, Uncle Phil. Even if . . . nothing much happened."

Spring changed to summer, and summer rolled into its final days. Phil was in a gloomy frame of mind when Timmy's eleventh birthday came around.

He watched Timmy draw a deep breath and—without puffing out his cheeks as a child would do—neatly blow out the eleven candles on his cake. It was an efficient, sprayless, perfectly-controlled operation, an operation carried out happily and in high spirits, and it depressed Phil. The "party" itself depressed him—a child's birthday party with no children present, unless you counted Timmy! Phil and Doc, Helen and Jerry, and Homer, the latter gray muzzled and stiff in the joints. That was the roster of the guests and it could almost be called the roster of Timmy's total acquaintances. His parents, his two friends, and a dog that at its best had never seemed

bright and now was obviously half-dead with age. The boy was not normal, had no normal life, and gave no indication of ever being likely to take a normal role in life. He was a "disordered personality" if one could take comfort in a tag, but the true nature, cause and cure of his divergence from "normal" would remain unknown so long as his parents were afraid of tampering—

"Did you make a wish, Timmy?"

"Sure, Mom."

"Helen, honey—Tim knows that wishing when you blow out the candles is kid stuff."

"And what is he but an eleven-year-old kid?"

"He's too smart to believe in wishing, honey. Smarter than his old man, eh, Tim?"

"I'll *never* be as smart as you, Dad."

"That's my boy! But you don't kid me." Jerry turned to Phil and Clancey, feigning indignation. "You know what happened the other day? I brought home an old design that I dug out of the files and wanted to look over—a helical gravity conveyer—and when Tim saw it spread out on the table he said, 'That's the curve I was just reading about.' Now how did that little so-and-so know enough to call it a curve? I figured he was bluffing and got him to show me where he read about it, and the brat showed me all right—in one of my old college textbooks! Of course I only had to ask a few questions to find out that the college texts are far beyond him, but imagine him

dipping into them on his own and getting anything out of them at all! How about that, young man? Explain yourself."

Timmy hesitated, his eyes dark with uncertainty.

"You said I could," he blurted defensively. "Remember? Remember I asked you one day and you said—"

"Your father isn't angry, Timmy," Helen laughed, hugging him. "Honest, you get worried about the darnedest things! He's *proud* of you! Don't you know paternal boasting when you hear it?"

"Oh!" The shadow lifted and he laughed sheepishly. "I get it. It was nuance of idiom that threw me. Calling me a brat and a so-and-so was affectionate misdirection to conceal—" he broke off at their expressions. Helen darted a quick look around and came to his rescue again.

"Timmy-chile, where you git these heah high-falutin' *ex*-pressions I'll never know. Hit shore ain't from you' low-talkin' pappy."

"Or from yo' low-comedian mammy. It's all right, son—you just sound a bit bookish sometimes, that's all. Want some help with the dishes, Helen?"

"You know darn well you'd divorce me if I said yes. You and Clancey take Timmy in the front room and let him teach you something. Phil's just crazy to help with the dishes. Aren't you, Phil?"

"The obvious answer is yes. O. K., let's go."

They piled the dishes, joking and chattering until the sound of laughter from the front of the house told them that the others were occupied, then Helen put down the dish she was washing.

"Well, Phil?"

"Am I supposed to know what that means?"

"Phil, in plain language, is Timmy a . . . a genius?"

"No, I don't think so. He's unaccountably bright in many ways and just as unaccountably slow in others. I don't think genius comes into it at all."

"That's what I think, too. Timmy's no genius . . . yet he does things that only a genius-type could do."

"Don't exaggerate, Helen. A sharp youngster living a secluded life and studying more than he plays may be years ahead of other kids who go to public schools."

"He's farther ahead than you think, Phil. I have Timmy in the house with me all day, so maybe I know him better than Jerry does. He fooled Jerry with that business of the college textbooks, but not me. I think that for some reason Timmy doesn't want us to know how advanced he really is. I think he slipped up when he commented on that helical what's-it, then covered his slip by pretending he'd only leafed through the texts and picked up a bit here and there. I know when that boy's fooling, and I know he deliberately fluffed the questions Jerry put to him. Timmy's just plain lousy when it comes to dissembling, you know, as if it was completely

foreign to him to lie. All right, all right, I know what you're going to say—fond mama building mother's-intuition fantasy around only child.

"Well, I kept an eye on him after that and about a week later Jerry brought home some calculus dealing with a new design he's developing. He ran into trouble with it and sweated and swore for an hour, while Timmy sat and read and I kept peeking in the hall mirror that lets you see into the front room from the kitchen. After a while Jerry left the room to look for some tables he wanted and Timmy slipped over and looked at his work, made a single notation, then dived back to his book as Jerry returned. Jerry started to sweat over the thing again, then suddenly did a double-take. He made some erasures and in five minutes had the whole thing worked out, cursing himself for misreading a figure or something.

"Now don't tell me it was just a coincidence. Timmy hadn't seen that problem before and it should have been miles over his head anyway, yet he gave it a quick glance, spotted the error, changed the limits of an integration and put Jerry on the right track. Just like that."

Phil carefully massaged a dry plate even drier.

"So I stagger back and gasp, 'I can't believe it!' or something insane but appropriate. The disturbing thing to me is that I not only *can* believe it, I do believe it. Completely. I may as well tell you now what I haven't yet told anyone else, that I've been methodically tricking Timmy for some months past—in fact, ever since I began to suspect that his knowledge of the sciences was, to say the least, unusual for a boy his age. I probably led him into making that slip with Jerry, identifying the curve. By giving him the impression that any boy his age would know far more chemistry, math and physics than is actually the case, I tripped him into revealing that he himself knows a very great deal about them. Perhaps more than I do.

"I begin to suspect now that I didn't set my sights nearly high enough in leading him on, but God alone knows where he could have learned. On anything that could be related to the humanities he's very slow, but in the physical sciences he's out of this world. His secluded life—unable to mix with other kids, go to shows, games, or do anything that gets him into crowds—gives him a very limited background for understanding his environment, leaves him unboyish. He doesn't understand people. I constantly have the impression that he is anxious to do the right thing, but is simply baffled by problems in human relations."

"I know. He looks at me sometimes as though he's just desperate to reach me somehow—a lonely, unhappy little soul. He gets plenty of affection from both of us, but it isn't the answer—it just isn't the answer."

"Tell me, Helen, do you love your son?"

"Do I—! Well, now, really Phil –what kind of a question is that?"

"A simple one. Do you love Timmy?"

"Of course I do. He's very dear to me."

"Do you love your son?"

"Now look here—! I told you . . . Phil, what are you getting at?"

"I'm wondering why you have no doubt that you love Timmy, but the question of whether you love your son confuses you and throws you on the defensive. You react strongly, evade answering, take refuge in exclamations and unfinished sentences. A species of stuttering. Can it be that you find it difficult to think of Timmy as your son? *Do you doubt that he is your son?* Here, sit down! I didn't think it would hit you so hard."

"Phil, the only other moment like this in my life was when I first admitted to myself years ago that Timmy was . . . what he used to be. An imbecile. Phil, it *can't* be true! He *is* my son! There's been no substitution, no—"

"Easy, Helen, easy. I agree with you. I've checked back as fully as I can, and I'm sure there's been no trickery of any sort. Timmy was born to you eleven years ago, beyond a shadow of a doubt."

"But you've felt it too, haven't you? He's sweet and lovable in his funny, confused way, talking like a comic-strip kid one minute and an encyclopedia the next—so empty and faraway sometimes, then loving and affectionate, as though to make up to us for being . . . away. I'm sure he loves us, Jerry and I, as much as we love him, but I feel that we've failed him, that he wants love but it can't reach him. I'll say it, Phil. I feel that he's not mine, that he's apart from us. Ridiculous, isn't it? I can't feel true kinship for my own child, much as he means to me. I feel better now that I've said it."

"I wish I could say the same, but I don't know that I feel any better for adding one more question mark to a long, long line of them. Like you, I sense a loneliness, a reaching out from Timmy for something I can't give him no matter what I do, no matter how I try to understand. I watch him, and I think of that line '. . . a stranger and afraid . . .' What is there that frightens him? Can it . . . possibly . . . be us?"

VI

Indian summer now lay softly upon the land.

On a wooded rise ten miles from the outskirts of the town, close by a bluff overlooking the bushland, the tan walls of a small tent warmed to the late afternoon sun. Here and there beyond the bushland the supper-smoke of scattered farms stood columned and motionless. The only sound on the still air was the harsh, labored breathing of the dying Homer.

The dog lay in the open near the edge of the bluff, his eyes closed, his companions seated nearby. Phil

had brought Timmy on a week-end camping trip that now appeared spoiled at the outset, for the short, steep climb up the bluff had unexpectedly proven too much for old gray-muzzle. His trembling legs had barely carried him to the top before he collapsed, and now it was only a question of how long he must suffer before release. Phil glanced toward a .22 rifle lying with their gear. It would be more merciful.

"No, Uncle Phil. He'll live until sundown at least. Let him have that much."

"I'm sorry this happened, Timmy, but now that it has I think we should make it easier for him."

"You liked him, didn't you, Uncle Phil?"

"Yes, Tim . . . I'm a bit surprised to find that I really did. I can't say that I'm much of an animal-lover, but in his way Homer was the perfect Old Faithful. No beauty and not very bright, you must admit, but he never left your side. It won't seem the same."

"It won't *be* the same, Uncle Phil." The boy raised his head to look over the distant bushland. His face was composed.

"Timmy, I hesitate to say this, but—"

"I don't seem very upset about it?"

"Well, yes. Did you really care much for Homer? You never paid any attention to him, never petted or played with him, just let him tag along."

"I had no need to pet or play with him, and it was enough that he give me all of his attention. I should have spared a thought for him, his needs and limitations, but it's too late now." The answering voice was subtly changed from that of a boy, and strangely gentle. "A dog's life is so short, hardly more than today and tomorrow. A breath or two, and it has begun and ended. When Homer dies he will be free, and I will no longer exist."

A chill slid over the man.

What makes a voice? Air and musculature and tissue, but what more? A brain, a mind—a life. An accumulative series of reactive patterns called Life grows like a fragile crystal around a seeding impulse that lacks a name acceptable to all, and the resulting structure is called "personality" or "character" and it influences what it touches in a manner peculiar to itself alone. Given the crude tools of a sound-producing mechanism it will, if it chooses and has the skill, disclose some trifle of its own true nature. Phil heard words that should have sounded idiotic coming from a boy, but they carried complete and instant conviction. Without elocutionary tricks, without fire and oratory, the boy-voice had changed in timbre, acquired a quality that could sway multitudes—the wild thought crossed Phil's mind that what it had acquired was the quality of complete sanity.

A suspicion, planted deliberately and nurtured through the years, matured on the triggered instant. Phil twisted around—alert, wary, almost

hostile, his eyes searching the somewhat bony young face. His gaze was returned steadily, with assured composure.

"Who are you?" he demanded bluntly. "*What* are you?"

Timmy laughed lightly, patently at ease.

"I am nothing, Phil. Nothing at all."

"Rot. You are flesh and blood, human, and were born to Helen and Jerry. What else?"

"Is there more?"

"Stop playing!" Phil jumped up angrily, standing tall over the seated figure. "I've watched you for years. You've given yourself away repeatedly."

"Ah, that 'advanced scientific knowledge' worried you badly, didn't it?"

"I . . . see. You revealed it deliberately. There are other things. Your aversion to crowds—"

"Their thinking confused me. They were dangerous."

"Were?"

"After tonight, crowds will not matter."

"Because Homer will be dead?"

"Because Homer will be dead, poor beast. My conscience will be dead."

"What on earth does that mean? I find it impossible either to doubt you or to think of you as a boy any longer."

"That is because your mind is filled with uncertainties, mine with certainties. You have never before met anyone in whom certainty was a clear truth unquestioned on any level of any remote corner of the mind. I am such a one."

Phil sat down helplessly. There was no point in standing. Whatever Tim was, he was not going to be dominated by tricks.

"What are you?"

"What can I say? I am a book that is being read, yet I am neither the pages nor the printing on the pages, but only the meaning inherent in the shapes and sequences of the letters that comprise the printing."

"Can't you give me a straight answer?"

"It is difficult. You must think about what I say."

"But the ideas recorded in a book are merely—thoughts. They have no tangible existence."

"Nor have I."

"You're not a product of my imagination!"

"Hardly."

"Are you giving me that line about 'All is Illusion'?"

"No," the boy laughed spontaneously.

"Are you a mutant, a new evolutionary developement?"

"No, nor am I a machine or a monster."

"At least you're alive!"

"That, I think, is a matter of definition."

"Then, for the third time, what are you! Stop baiting me!"

Timmy's hand closed on Phil's—a firm, warm, dirty and somewhat

calloused boy's hand that was unquestionably flesh, blood and bone.

"Take it easy, Uncle Phil." Perhaps he had pushed too hard. The dancing eyes veiled themselves a little and the intangible, indescribable magnetism somehow faded. Phil, looking at him, was suddenly able to see him and to think of him once more as Timmy, a boy with unusual qualities, but the same boy he had watched for years. He shook his head and felt somewhat bemused, as he had done once before.

"Look, let's get a fresh start, Tim, and stop going in circles."

"O. K., Uncle Phil." He was an eleven-year-old again, responding obediently.

"I've suspected for years that we didn't know the truth about you—that you were something special, something new."

"Well—" Tim appeared to consider it gravely. "Yeah, I guess that's fair enough. I'm something new, all right."

"For years, then, you've been concealing something—something that showed through whenever you made a slip."

"Wanna bet on how many of those slips were deliberate?" Tim challenged, then joined Phil's rueful laugh. "Not all of them were, I got to admit, but most of them."

"But today—apparently because Homer is dying—you've abandoned pretense, come out in the open."

"Not all the way out, not yet. You've still got some shocks coming, Uncle Phil."

"I don't doubt it, you young hoodlum. You were pretty overwhelming there for a few minutes. But why all the mystery? Why not just tell me?"

"You explained why."

"Overwhelming? Are you that terrific?"

"I'm a humdinger, Bub. Think you can stand it now?"

"I think the full blast would be better than any more of your 'gentle' hints."

"That's what you think." Come now, the first shock had been fairly neatly delivered and fielded after all, the concept of difference proposed, established and accepted. "Well, here goes. You remember that spray of flowers I handed you in the car that night?"

"I've had my suspicions about them ever since."

"O. K.—now smell this pine cone."

Phil looked at it with distrust.

"The thing that beats me is how I can be morally certain that pine cone is loaded, cocked, and ready to fire, and yet I take it," he let Tim put it in his hand, "and smell it." He raised it to his nostrils, held his breath for a moment, then gingerly sniffed.

Time stopped.

All sense of duration was gone. Awareness drifted in formless inattention until a focal point, a mere nucleus of intellect, captured and held it. The nucleus strengthened, became an impression of identity—

not his own identity, nor any that he knew, but that of some Other. From this other presence came insistently the warmth and gentleness of good will, an unreserved outpouring that sought to evoke an unreserved response.

Isolation, the sanctum of the mind, took the assault, melting like an ice-castle in the sun—but before the tempting surrender could become irrevocable alarms rang through his being and his mind gathered in on itself in confusion, holding its isolation intact and inviolate. Through the opposing desires to yield and to withhold, to break barriers down and to raise them up, he detected from the Other a reaction both of pity and of revulsion. The pressure decreased. He knew then that what he yielded willingly would be accepted as sufficient, and no more be asked of him than he was capable of giving. Somehow, it was not a victory, but a defeat.

He became aware that the private domain he had claimed for his own was truly his own, a corridored, compartmented, dungeoned storehouse of filed fancies and forgotten files. A tunneled, revetted, embrasured and battlemented citadel filled with rusty armor and broken lances. A hock shop, a junkyard, a hall of distorting mirrors. A cemetery by the sea, a peak of glory, a slough of despond. A radiant light, an encroaching dark, the sweetest of melody, the sourest of discord. A library of trivia, museum of curiosa, sideshow of freaks, and shrine of greatness. It was the lowering pendulum, the waiting pit, the closing walls. It was the vaulting spirit, the gallant heart, the just and the kind and the merciful. Withal, it was a haunted castle, perpetually besieged, the towers soaring but the structure toppling. It was himself. His memories, his experiences, his actions and reactions, his life. And it was appalling.

A gentle prompting from the Other roused him from his self-immersion and for a moment he was all panic lest his secret had been observed. Mechanisms he had not known he possessed slammed doors and banged shutters over windows in a fine frenzy, so that the Other winced and fell back, pleadingly, then softly and insistently drew near once more. He realized that there was a purpose that must be served. Something was desired from him. A voice. He tried, and the croak of a clogged throat would have held as much meaning as the disharmonious thrust of thought that began in chaos and ended in futility. Abashed, he would not try again. Silence crept around him, the silence of isolation.

The most disarmingly hesitant, the most reassuringly inoffensive of thoughts touched as lightly as a breath and was accepted as his own. He saw no cause to take alarm. Such an insignificant invasion was of no more moment than the blowing of a grain of dust beneath a locked door.

The thought lay among his own, and moved like a thread through his own, and the elements that it drew together became the acceptance of an

idea. Secure in his ill-kept citadel, he permitted a rapport so tenuous he could break it at will, yet so strong that—

VII

Memory tinged with homesickness tricked him into a sad reverie. That they were only memories, these thoughts that rose up to slyly capture his attention, was clear. He was under no illusion that he was experiencing for the first time events that had long melted into the past, for they had a common-place familiarity that stamped them as scenes revisited, events relived, dear friends recalled to mind.

He stood alone at the edge of a meadow with the afternoon sun hot on his back and debated with Andra the advisability of transplanting a certain shrub from its chance-chosen place in the meadow to a position in their own gardens. Throughout their discussion he was conscious of little drops of perspiration threading their way down his naked spine, and he longingly savored the coolness of the stream-bank on which Andra reclined, a mile or two to the south.

In good-humored exasperation he commented enviously on woman's lot and drew a dry rejoinder from a chance traveler on the highway to the north. He joined in the general laugh at his own expense, hearing the sally repeated and elaborated until it drifted out of conversational range. He was tempted to follow it farther out of curiosity, but it was not good form to blanket local conversation for a mere whim. While his attention was distracted, however, Andra became involved in an exchange of local recipes with a newcomer to the district, a farm-wife whose husband had had a fancy to try the westward farm lands. He joined the husband in a wry grimace at the loquacity of women, and simultaneously caught sight of a distant figure crossing a ridge somewhat north of him. The figure paused at the same instant, looked searchingly in his direction, then waved on sighting him and strolled on. It was the traveler whose quip was now being repeated miles away, far in advance of him. Andra showed no sign of running out of recipes and returning to shrubs. He sighed, and stood alone in the meadow . . .

The casual facility of memory bridged time and space without disorientation. He was strolling in the evening with his bride, Andra's arm linked with his for the added pleasure of physical contact. In the manner of lovers they supplemented their thoughts with murmured words and sounds, thus sharing still another physical intimacy, for they were still in that newly-mated condition where every manifestation of the one was a source of delight and wonder to the other.

They paused momentarily by a vine-covered wall and he felt a cool frond reach out to caress his shoulder while a long tendril curled gracefully about his forearm between the

upper and the lower wrists. A few hundred-thousand years ago his remote ancestor would have recoiled violently from the touch of what was then a strangler vine, but now he casually disengaged the half-sentient tendril and with his mind caught the faint, faint flicker of rudimentary awareness; thus far had nature progressed with the vine, apparently reluctant to abandon a false start toward mobility and intelligence for an unsuitable species. Or perhaps, Andra added, in nature's long-term view the experiment might still be considered promising. He shook his head.

The vine had learned peaceful ways that saved it from extinction, drawing its food quietly from the earth while further developing a mobility of sorts, but eventually an impasse would be reached when greater mobility would endanger nutrition. If the roots withdrew from the soil, the vine would die—unless, he agreed slowly, echoing her shudder, the vine solved the dilemma by becoming again a carnivorous strangler. Nature made unaccountable blunders and sometimes found strange remedies, turning a blessing for one species into a curse for others . . .

On the same impulse they gazed at the night sky blazing with the heart of the galaxy spread around them, a galaxy as yet less than half mapped, only a small fraction of its secrets known. Like many new-mates they planned a leisurely, lengthy quest among the stars, a trip for

which their mutual absorption peculiarly fitted them. After all, the advancement of knowledge still required physical and intellectual research and the joy of living still demanded physical and emotional release, but there was one great barrier to space-travel.

Leaving the great community of Challon ordinarily meant leaving an intensely experienced fellowship to endure a shattering isolation no less intensely felt, unless one were fortunate enough to be chosen for an exploration team. There was both comfort and common sense in the use of teams of the greatest numerical strength consistent with efficiency, but the resources demanded by such teams limited the number that could be fielded at one time. Consequently, private voyages in small craft were not entirely uncommon among the hardy—or the temporarily self-sufficient, such as he and Andra. In a few days they would leave Challon behind, break for the first time the half-spiritual link with all their world, and voyage forth in the belief that their love for each other was alone enough to sustain them.

At the same instant the same doubt of self-worthiness crept into each mind and was read and stoutly answered by the other, while a dozen neighbors near and distant interrupted their own concerns to murmur encouragement and recall the doubts they, too, had felt and learned to dismiss. Reassured he led Andra back to the house, scarcely aware of the background bustle of other minds busy with other matters—nor, in fact, greatly caring at that moment that others existed. The manner of love may change, but not the manners of lovers.

Memory surged after memory on waves of nostalgia and homesickness that told their own story of why the memories had been long buried. Challon had fallen away behind them and the strangeness of the cleavage from their fellows had dismayed them. In and around the spaceport center, a multitude of the fellows they were never to see again had paused long enough in their own affairs to mesh thoughts in a final projection of encouragement that reached after the dwindling ship like a gesture of farewell.

A long, long farewell. A final farewell, unrecognized for the last parting that it was.

They had known from the experience of others that the first terrible silence would be a hard thing to endure until the strangeness wore off. At first they huddled like two children, driving their thoughts far into unanswering space in desperate disbelief that such utter silence could be. Repelled by space, they turned to each other and found more complete union than they had thought possible. From the depth of their union they found the strength and growth and maturity to adapt, to endure, and to survive. The fear passed. The worst was over.

Planetfall succeeded planetfall and

the routine of their activities became smooth and practiced. As was the custom, they had been asked to obtain various items of information from sundry known but largely unexplored planets to help determine whether a later visit by a full-scale exploration team would be advisable. In one system they made a rapid instrumental survey of the only major continent on the only inhabitable planet, from a height of a hundred miles. In another, a skimming prospecting trip in a certain area confirmed a predicted rich ore body. And at all times, of course—particularly when they left the known systems behind and entered virgin territory—there was the Challonari to be trained and observed.

The Challonari—a part-organic, artificial brain—was one of the most promising recent developments of Challon science. It was also one of the most debatable, for the Challonari was capable of independent thought in its limited fashion and yet had been devised solely as an instrument, a tool. It had no freedom of action, no physical independence, but it had childlike emotions and—this was the damnable thing—a sense of identity and awareness of its creators as such. Thus the moral issue was raised. To the Challon, the control or coercion of an independent intelligence was a cardinal outrage. No greater sanctity existed than the sanctity of the individual, for anything that prejudiced or restricted the right of the individual to full mastery of himself was worse even than the deliberate taking of life. It was murder of the ego. In a telepathic society, life itself could not be more precious than self-control.

The combined growth and manufacture of the Challonari had been stopped in horror when it was realized that their capabilities were greater than anticipated. An organic tool had not been created, but rather a . . . what? When does a tool become an entity? If it is an entity, what right have its makers to control it and use it as a tool? What right have they to—the thorniest issue of all—destroy it or otherwise put it aside when it is no longer required? Until these fundamental issues could be settled, the handful of Challonari in existence must be cared for, trained and observed as if they were backward children.

The main function of the Challonari on such a voyage as this was to safeguard the ship and its immediate vicinity when on strange worlds. This it accomplished by a swift, simplified appraisal of the offensive capacities of any life form coming within its limited range. If their natural weapons—claws, size, poison, fangs—rendered them potentially dangerous should the Mentor leave the ship, then the Challonari projected into their minds a simple disinterest in the environs of the ship, a reluctance to approach closer. If this failed, the reluctance impulse became tinged with fear, the intensity of the fear increasing until the desired retreat occurred.

If the approaching unknown was

of sufficient intelligence to identify the disinterest-reluctance-fear impulse as a telepathic warning, then no further effort was made to turn it back, much less to hurl it back by force. That would have been unthinkable. An intelligent entity approaching the vessel would be welcomed and requested to identify itself, while notice of its approach would be delivered to the Challon Mentor. Stranger and Challon would then inevitably join in friendly greeting, for hostile suspicion was unknown among minds that lay open one to the other. Among the handful of known life forms of sufficient intelligence to possess highly organized communications, no exception to this natural rule existed. A meeting of minds was a meeting of friends.

Memory flinched, wavered, then flowed on into previously forbidden areas. The long outward voyage approached its turning point, its disaster point. He did not know how or why it had happened. Perhaps in their mutual absorption he and Andra became careless. They had entered a planetary system, he recalled, and he had casually manipulated the controls. His perceptive faculties detected a tiny spurt of flame somewhere out of sight in the control bank, then the potent engines reacted out of control for a critical instant near planetary mass. The swift restoration of control only eased the crash, the automatics taking over a fraction too late after the fragile living tissue was smashed against the walls.

The return of consciousness told him at once that he was in the presence of death. Lying paralyzed and helpless in a pool of his own fluids, he could see the jelly that had been Andra. He quietly resigned himself to the death that might yet take days to come. It would be welcome.

An interregnum of shock followed in which his normal faculties were unseated, but with the passage of time he roused himself a little. Weakened as he was, his perception told him that the ship had buried itself deep in a swamp until it rested on bedrock. A dozen feet of muck and water lay over it. Even had they survived the crash they would have been helpless unless intelligent aid could be enlisted. He tried to drive out his thoughts in a cry for help, but the strength was gone from him. Within a radius of two miles there was no intelligent life, if any existed on the planet.

More from habit than for any other reason, he awakened the Challonari. It had survived the crash unharmed in its carefully cushioned immobility, unaware that anything had transpired between the last planetfall and this one. It immediately perceived that one of the Mentors had gone, but before it could ask questions it was sternly directed to concentrate its attention on the environs of the vessel. Having thus distracted it from the presence of death, he sank back gratefully into a stasis of no-thought. Let time

pass. It would bring succor or death, and he could do nothing more to hasten either one.

The Challonari roused him from his stupor on the third day after the crash. It was disturbed, excited by something beyond its comprehension. While he had lain helpless and shriveling on a compartment floor something unusual had approached to within half a mile of the ship through the thick swamp vegetation. The life form had apparently detected the first tendrils of thought from the Challonari and without preamble, as a natural defense, erected a savage mental shield. Pain and chaos that made coherent thinking difficult shook the artificial brain, but since this evidently was not an intelligent life form, else it would not have reacted in such a manner, the Challonari increased in intensity its fear-reluctance impulse. The mental shielding of the intruder blazed and crackled with increasing dissonance, radiating pain, fear and panic, but no decipherable intelligent thought. It drew nearer, erratically, apparently running, then swiftly lapsed into unconsciousness. That was when the bewildered Challonari had called him for aid.

He reached out wearily with his mind in automatic response, touched and hastily withdrew. Even when unconscious the strange being had an aura of discordance about its mind. He would have shivered had he still been capable of physical reaction, for this was Unsanity, a thing he had heard of but never before encountered. The Challonari caught his protective thought and withdrew from contact, though not without a soft protest, for it was inquisitive as any child. It, too, had heard of unsanity. Rare stresses or injuries now and again temporarily upset the balance of the mind and required the healing touch of other minds. But unsanity was not something the Challonari could handle. It withdrew from possible infection, protestingly, fearful for its beloved Mentor but incapable of disobeying a clear command.

His own great pity for the sick creature outside conquered the inertia of approaching death and he rallied what mental forces he still retained. He could not disregard suffering nor withhold whatever aid it was in his power to give. Carefully, knowing something of what to expect, he probed the shield which was no true shield but an uproar of faulty coördination comparable to the disruptions coming from a badly tuned radio. Wincing, as a musician winces when harsh, grating dissonance strikes his ear, he gingerly probed deeper and deeper, exploring this strange and fascinating structure that was unlike anything he had ever experienced. It was an extraordinary complexity that spread before him—a maze, a labyrinth, a magnificent corruption of order and reason.

His first discovery he half expected. This was a mind of an intelligence level not far beneath his own, though fearfully hobbled by miscon-

ceptions, superstitions, half-truths and fallacies. Life had brutally mishandled and shackled—*life* had? It was an adult of its species. How could its condition have existed undetected for so long? He extended his explorations, and suddenly the incredible truth lay revealed.

The dominant species on this planet was that theoretically possible but logically improbable mistake of nature, a race of intelligent non-telepaths!

Fantastic as it was, there was no room for doubt. He was glad he had ordered the Challonari to withdraw from contact. To accept the existence of such beings required a flexibility under shock, an adaptability of reasoning, that the limited Challonari could never rise to. It was like a blow at the structure of the universe, but it raised a fascinating, age-old problem—what possible means of adequate communication could they have?

Excited despite the great discomfort of maintaining contact with this mind, he extended his explorations in search of the answer. A growing suspicion was quickly confirmed beyond question, explaining at once the sickening deformities of the wasted mind and the enigma of the alternative means of communication. There simply was no adequate communication! From that, all else stemmed. Each of these creatures, these—he searched for the term—these "Man" as they called themselves, was an island, an isolation of ego in a flood of dark fears that began lapping about them in early childhood and never ceased to rise. And this, by its own conception, was a "normal" specimen! It had "matured" in a thoroughly competitive society instead of the completely coöperative society of the Challon. It had never really known or understood its own true nature, much less that of its fellows. It had never truly known security, serenity, freedom, or peace. The eternal wonder was that it had progressed at all.

Deeper and deeper he explored, tracing and classifying, filled with awe. The incredible creature knew little or nothing of its own nervous system and would not have been aware of loss if the most essential portion of its brain had been surgically removed! Its life span was only a small fraction of what it should have been since, in its ignorance, it failed to repair itself as it had the innate ability to do. And yet, what an unbelievable treasury lay locked and sealed here. Only long study could render this infinite honeycomb intelligible, even to a Challon. Nothing like this had ever been known.

Mingled horror and profoundest admiration grew at what he found, but the creature began to awaken. With a deft skill he planted a suggestion, then hastily withdrew from contact before the impossible discord of mental cacophony became unbearable. The creature rose, wondering at its previous panic, and moved away from the vicinity of the vessel that now, above all else, it must never discover.

That was the first problem to be faced.

By learning what he had, the heaviest duty and the greatest moral obligation his race had ever borne was laid upon him. The last secret of these "Man" made effective action imperative. Although he himself was crushed beyond hope of survival, somehow his new knowledge *and all that it implied* must survive.

Unobtrusive, physical reduction of the ship to completely unrecognizable debris might have to be accomplished eventually, but it certainly was not immediately possible. However, perception told him that the heavy vessel was already hidden beneath silt and stagnant water. It would be safe for a while from accidental discovery. The Challonari was self-sustaining and could survive untended for years, if necessary, serving to keep the area clear of wild life that might draw hunters of the dominant species dangerously near.

There remained, then, the problem of providing a substitute for his own personal survival. Here, the prospect seemed hopeless. The requirements were a continuance of understanding, together with both the will and the ability to act as necessary. Theoretically, he could have forcefully taken possession of the body and mind of any suitable subject, but the mere thought of such a violation was impossibly abhorrent. Respect for the right of the individual to self-will was so deeply ingrained as to make the deliberate unseating of another's reason virtually impossible. On the other hand, free-willed coöperation and understanding were equally out of reach; to enter the conscious mind of these beings was agony for both parties. They could neither project nor receive thoughts.

Ebbing vitality and the increased urgency of the problem drove him to a desperate resource. A pregnant female came within the extreme range of his perception. An embryo mind might serve! The mind, as yet unsullied, sleeping, a blank page untouched by the world, was open to him. If the appropriate knowledge was seeded in its memory banks it might—it *must*—remain sane despite the world, and a sane mind would not dispute what must be done.

He made a quick evaluation of the subject mind and discovered the flaw. The intelligence potential was too low. The embryo would not be capable of understanding the planted memories as they came to the conscious level, nor be capable of acting on them if they were understood. Time was ebbing fast, and vitality with it. Very well, then, the most desperate, the most questionable resource of all remained. The unused, unrecognized prime center, true seat of the intellect, must be activated the way nature presumably had intended that it should be, had not something gone wrong in the dawn years of the planet.

There could be no moral objection

to this measure if successful, since it amounted to giving sight to a blind man. The element of grave doubt lay in the relative chances of success or failure. The strange, interlocking structure of the unconscious mind of the embryo was not something that could be unraveled and examined in a hurry. Honesty compelled him to evaluate himself as young and inexperienced, not especially noted among his own kind for brilliantly incisive judgment. It was not the sort of thing that he should even attempt without long study. It was too risky, too indecisive, too—

Time made the decision. There was no time left. The chill of death told its own story. In an agony of haste he summoned all that remained of vitality and fought off Death while he entered the embryo mind.

The fast-shriveling body in the spaceship retained life long enough to recognize the blunder, but not long enough to correct it. The wrong was done, and could not be undone.

The memories that mercifully blurred became clear again. He knew that in due course the mishandled embryo experienced birth, entering the world normally as a helpless, feebly squirming, pathetically vulnerable mite, and in no way drew unusual attention to itself. No one knew, or cared, that intellectual awakening was phenomenally quick, the first tentative questionings occurring in only the fourth week of life. He recalled how the stirring of objective awareness brought with it a half-remembered pang of death, and how the stirring of innocent wonder brought—memories. The memory banks flooded open at the touch of wonder, poured out their contents, and the fledgling ego went down before the surge, overwhelmed forever.

Inexperienced in such delicate maneuvers and overtaken at the crises by the climactic unseating of Death, he had poured into the empty memory banks the whole contents of his own mind. All his knowledge, all his experiences, all his memories on every level of incidents great and small. Everything. Including the complex and ineradicable concept of his own identity.

VIII

The involuntary start that shook the pine cone from his hand freed Phil's nostrils of the anaesthetic. Rapidly clearing eyes watched the cone fall near his feet and roll a few inches. A hawk that had been wheeling in the sky at the edge of his vision was still wheeling. Only seconds had elapsed, but this time there remained a clear recall of all that had transpired in those few seconds of lost time—seconds in which he had lived another's memories as though they were his own.

Reluctantly, impelled more by fascination than intent, he raised his head and faced his companion. The compassionate eyes that met his did hold certain childlike qualities of freedom from suspicion or hardness,

but the gaze was not that of a simple child, nor was the bearing. Incongruity sparked a scarcely-controllable impulse to hysterical laughter. A small boy seated on a log, regarding his elder with gentle kindliness and understanding! Phil made a sound deep in his throat and swung his head away, afraid he was going to be sick. "Timmy" made no move. The silence endured, as it had to endure until one reaction or another prevailed. Gradually Phil worked to a conclusion.

"You call it a 'blunder,'" Phil said thickly. "You made a freak of an unborn baby for your own ends, and you call it a blunder. Anyone else might be content with a little innocent butchery, but not you . . . you take over children, body and soul!"

"No."

"What we've been calling Timmy is a secondhand suit of clothes for *you!* And you claim you're not a monster!"

"Nor am I."

Phil struggled for violent words to match his feelings, then sighed heavily. "No," he agreed, despite himself. "You are not. I know that. Maybe you've controlled me just as you tricked me into entering your mind and living your memories but, sickened as I am, I still can't help believing you more implicitly than I've ever believed anyone. Nor do I see any reason to."

"You've never known anyone as surely as you know me, now that our minds have been in phase. Emotional reactions stemming from a dozen hidden causes may mislead you, but at the back of your mind you *know* me."

"And you know—me."

"I know only what I need to know about you. Your private memories are your own and will always re-

main so unless you invite me to share them."

"Yet you opened all yours to me?"

"Far from it. At this point it would give you too much to digest all at once. The major part of my concentration was required to maintain mental contact without any help from you, and to blanket the interference set up by the analytical part of your ego through its fixed, deep-rooted conviction equating the individual with mental isolation. Faced with absolute proof to the contrary, your analytical mind still tries to insist that what it has always believed to be true must still be true, otherwise everything is suspect and, therefore, anti-survival. In other words, on a survival level your mind tries to reject free telepathy as it would reject any other upsetting of the basic tenets of your existence. That and the disharmony existing in your mind is a large part of the 'protecting' aura of discordance that seals you off from me. The memories I shared with you I selected and edited for expediency. Unfortunately, your physical reaction to a startling thought caused you to break away before you had the full truth and left you with a false impression."

"Either the memories you fed me were truth, or they were lies. Which is it?"

"The data was true, but your interpretation of it is false because you are still in a state of shock, still fighting for survival on a moronic level. What do you take me to be?"

"You name it. By your own admission, at best 'you' are a false personality forcibly impressed on a helpless mind that never had a ghost of a chance. In effect, you are a parasite living on a host, the reincarnation of an ego that should be eleven years dead."

"Not eleven years dead—only eight."

"What difference does . . . *eight?*"

"Eight years dead."

Prickles crawled over Phil's scalp and his mind raced. A series of memories snapped into place.

"Eight. And I laughed at Clancey!"

"I know—I heard. You were getting too close for comfort so I distracted you by giving you a headache."

"Stop—let me get my breath!" His voice rose until it threatened to crack. What am I talking to! A *dog?*"

"Yes."

"Homer? I don't believe it!"

"Watch." The boy slipped from the log and sat beside it on the ground, his back braced. "Timmy would simply fall on his face," he explained, and with the words the face became empty and the mouth hung foolishly open. Control had been relinquished. The corner of Phil's eye caught an answering movement that his senses wanted to reject, but he turned. Homer had raised his head painfully and was looking directly at him, unmistakable intelligence in the exhaustion-glazed eyes. The fringed lips curled back, the throat worked. Strange

sounds were forced out, growling but not doglike.

"Ar-ro . . . ar-rik." It was a barely recognizable distortion of "Hello-Warwick." "Ok-all . . . orr . . . ron." Vocal-cords-wrong? "Im . . . ork." Tim-talk?

The gray-muzzled head sank back wearily. A scuffling sound drew Phil's dazed eyes and he turned back in time to see Tim sit up again briskly, ignoring the old dog.

"I hate that mangled speech, don't you, Uncle Phil? I'll still call you that, if you don't mind. You're still as much my uncle as you ever were, and I'm the only Tim you've known." He watched Phil anxiously. "Knocks the wind out of you, doesn't it? But ordinary speech is painfully limited to begin with, without trying to force it from poor old Homer." He chattered on nervously, giving Phil time to collect himself. "You see, Timmy is as mindless now as when he was born, three years before 'my' ship crashed in the swamp over there. Look back through your newspaper files and you'll find a brief mention of a mysterious explosion reported during a night of heavy rain. That was us." He wet his lips, watching the silent white face. "Look, I had nothing at all to do with Timmy being born an imbecile. He's like a car that functions well enough if a driver takes over the physical controls that Timmy is incapable of handling for himself. Lacking a driver, the controls and the car stand idle. It is only the body that I manipulate, not the dormant, disconnected mind. For myself, although I can't help identifying myself emotionally and subjectively as the Challon, Objective reason assures me that I am Homer, with a complete but false set of memories and an artificially stimulated intelligence.

"As the Challon, I realized that the embryo Homer was of low actual intelligence, but high potential intelligence. The dangerous peculiarity of this planet is that several of the higher species have no known or recognized function for the most important portion of their brain. It lies fallow, unused, blocked off much as Timmy's whole mind is blocked off from his service. In eight years I have done no more than form the mere skeleton of a theory to account for that, but the means of correction was obvious from the start. Like the appendix that floats free at one end and serves no known purpose, the brain has an incomplete neural path of an unusual nature that has effectively camouflaged its true purpose. The intended function of the connection was the energizing of that prime center which you have not yet discovered and without which you differ from Timmy only in degree, for you cannot realize more than a fragment of your incredible potential.

"The same condition exists among the higher mammals. Releasing Homer's blocked potential placed at his service the intellectual capacity of a very clever human—according to your false standards—but not of

a human genius. If I had not imposed my ego on him . . . you see, I cannot help thinking of myself as the Challon, although I know I am Homer . . . if I had not robbed Homer of his identity and self-will, of his right to possess and control himself, he would have developed personality, characteristics and aptitudes of his own, appropriate to a canine of high intelligence. As it is, there are false memories of aptitudes Homer never had nor could have. Physical limitations alone make some of them impossible. How could a dog tinker with machinery, for example? Yet I 'remember' working on machines of my own design. Homer's mind, in other words, remembers as first-person data experiences it never had.

"In actual fact, 'I' who speak to you now am no more than the record contained in a book. In terms of personality, Homer is the hidden structure giving strength and substance to a false facade. 'I' am the false facade, faithfully copied from another structure. 'I' am a superimposure of ephemeral data, governing its own employment by a mind that has been restricted from developing its own data. The 'I' that speaks to you has no real existence, though its pattern is being subtly and continuously altered by that which it cloaks. If you put a drop of intense stain and a drop of powerful scent into a large tank of distilled water, you change the superficial character of the water, make it seem to be other than what it is. But it remains essentially a tank full of water, now containing an obtrusive trifle of alien matter in addition to the hydrogen and oxygen that decide its most significant properties. That is what the Challon did to Homer—he released the potential, then accidentally but indelibly stained it with his own personality.

"To me, now, it merely *seems* as though I first suffered death and then an unwelcome resurrection, awakening in despair to find myself usurping the helpless body of an almost new-born animal. Nothing physical or spiritual of the Challon survived, but the embryo mind had been fed a ready-made identity and so believed that it had already existed as a Challon before re-birth as a dog. Its brain received instantly all 'my' training, so that it became at once 'mature.' What I have endured in these eight years—the isolation of mind and inadequacy of body—have been a blunderer's reward visited upon his victim as a further injury. Now that Homer lies near death—and 'I' with him, of course—I welcome 'our' approaching release from an unhappy situation.

"Wait—let me finish. Your main concern is what will happen to Timmy when 'we' die, but it will be simpler to understand if I explain as much as I can first. Finding myself to be a rational mind in the helpless, immature body of an animal, I thought I was isolated forever. In choosing the embryo to begin with, I was driven by the need

for haste and had not understood the limitations of a canine in a human world, nor would I have had any alternative if I had fully understood. When it was too late, it was not difficult to predict my future. I had no means of communicating with the dominant species, Man. In time, if I survived the hazards a puppy is exposed to, I could reveal my unusual intelligence—could even learn to communicate in some hopelessly labored manner. By using my store of inherited knowledge I could, if anyone would take a dog seriously, advance your science. But I could do nothing toward my main goals without exposing myself as an imitation Challon, and that I must never do lest I loose terrible consequences.

"I knew that the life span of my new body was pitifully short. The female had suffered repeated convulsions that effected the formation of the embryos and we were an ugly litter of little mongrels, doomed by our physical imperfections to a shorter-than-normal life if we were allowed to live and exposed to early drowning if we could not quickly charm ourselves into a home.

"The remainder of the litter—my brothers and sisters, if I could think of them as such—were callously placed in a weighted sack and tossed in the swamp, but by that time I had found a home. The Douglas home. Their child, Timmy, was an imbecile whose short-circuited mind lay open to me. I found by hasty experiments that Homer's mind was capable of controlling and manipulating the imbecile, like a puppeteer. The difficulties of controlling two bodies at once are tremendous, which is why Homer always struck you as clumsy and almost half-witted—he had to receive the absolute minimum of concentration so that his exhaustion at climbing the bluff this afternoon, for example, was not recognized in time. Well, there it is. I took over Timmy's helpless body eight years ago—too abruptly and with many errors—but it insured my survival for a short time at least. Now that time is at an end and the greater part of what I must do is still to be done—"

Phil sat with his face averted, his hands clenched between his knees. "The instinct to survive," he said in a muffled voice. "I can't blame you for what you did, but it was cruel! What a damnable trick to play on the parents!"

"Believe me, I know what you feel but there was no other way."

"No other!" He swung around, his face mottled and his breathing heavy. "Whatever you are, you made a Machiavellian puppet-master out of a lousy, flea-bitten mongrel! Was it beyond *those* powers to heal Timmy's mind?"

"I am not a psychopathic criminal."

"Do you imply that healing Timmy would involve repeating the swindle you worked on Homer?"

"No. I could have by-passed the simple neural block that was leaving Timmy helpless, and so have given

him what to you would have seemed his normal intelligence. In addition, I could have completed the work that nature left incomplete in all of you, and so have released his full, enormous capabilities. I could have done all this—can still do it—and still leave Timmy's ego untouched, to develop in its own way, among its own kind, knowing nothing of me for what I am."

"But you haven't done so. Why? Why!"

"I dared not."

"Danger? From a small boy?"

"Deadly danger—danger of infection that might threaten every intelligent race in the galaxy and even spread across the great gulfs of space beyond—"

"All this from poor little Timmy?"

"From what he might thereby become."

"I'm licked." Phil threw out his hands angrily. "I try to get a straight answer and all I get is implications. You tell me an outrageous story, and I believe you. You tell me you've neatly arranged to break the hearts of two of my best friends, and I respect your good intentions in doing so. Why? I love you like a brother, but I'm ready to take a rock and crush your skull in for a monster. I mean it! I could kill Homer with a single kick! I could—"

"I know, and I'm afraid of that hysterical impulse. I know the nature of the struggle going on in your mind better than you do, but only you can fight for control. I must wait for the outcome. When you have control of yourself—"

"You're so bloody sane and smug, you with your secondhand suit and hand-me-down knowledge!" He jumped up in a fury and turned his back on Timmy, addressing himself directly to Homer whose patient, pain-filled eyes held undeniable understanding. "Look at you! The telepathic genius with personal immortality—at a price only you could stomach! Too bad you got caught short and had to live in a cur! Tough, isn't it, having to wait for a mere moron to get control of himself! *You* know all the answers—why don't *you* control the situation?"

"Because the hand-me-down knowledge is no longer backed by the mental capacity of a Challon."

Phil stiffened as Tim's answering voice sounded behind him, quiet and friendly. Against his will, he turned back to the boy and seated himself again on the log. The boy's eyes caught and held his.

"The morality and outlook of the Challon are my morality and outlook, whether I wish it so or not." Tim might have been making a pleasantly inconsequential remark about the weather for all the importance he seemed to attach to his statement, yet his eyes held the strained, tight-lipped face. "The insight and understanding bequeathed by the Challon are sufficient to keep Homer's mind sane under long stress, and of course—"

His soothing voice went on and on, and presently his lungs expelled a

soft breath of relief as Phil relaxed a trifle, still breathing raggedly. Alert eyes watched him mop his damp forehead but the quiet words flowed in an unhurried stream, soothing, distracting, keeping the thread intact. At last the crises seemed behind them. ". . . So I can only wait for you to absorb the emotional impact of what I've told you. I had planned to prepare you, to break it gently if I could, but . . . you understand?" The voice paused, then repeated gently and insistently, "You understand, don't you?"

"Uh . . . yes. Homer—"

"He can't last much longer, and so of course I can't. I've landed one kick after another right smack in your emotional solar plexus and you're trying to catch your wind." Tim's hand casually struck a match for the cigarette Phil had put unlit in his mouth and the man leaned forward automatically, puffed, and automatically muttered a word of thanks. The quiet voice went on, taking an even more casual note. "What with trying to examine the implications of everything at once, you've stirred up a fine old Irish stew of fears, resentments and envies, all of them trying to reconcile the certain knowledge that I can be trusted and the essentially neurotic fear that I'm playing you for an almighty sucker.

"Remember, it has been even harder for me to reconcile myself to you human beings than it can possibly be for you to accept the existence of the Challon. The concept of telepathy is not a completely new or alien one to you, but the concept of a nontelepathic civilization was dismissed by the Challon ages ago as a simple contradiction of terms, a self-evident absurdity such as lifting oneself by one's bootstraps.

"It seemed so obvious that a civilized society could not develop without the capacity for intelligent coöperation, and intelligent coöperation of any real complexity was impossible without adequate communication. What means of communication could adequately replace the direct linking of mind and mind? Failing any answers short of fantasy, the proposition always remained a sort of classroom joke with us. In fact, several classic satires exist on the subject and one of the least successful—because it seemed too ridiculous—suggested an elaborately coded system of vocalizing. We have a very elementary spoken language and a more complex code of inscriptions for essential records, but neither the written nor the spoken system could possibly be called an adequate means of communication.

"I realize now that one of the satires was not the rather frightening effort that it seemed to be, but a brilliant scientific prediction of the probable development and history of a race of highly intelligent nontelepaths. The composer of the epic pointed out that where the culture and character of the Challon neither permitted nor desired concealment of any sort, a race that lacked adequate communication would have no

choice but to live as disharmonious groups of strangers, never truly knowing either their fellows or themselves. He postulated what you now call traumatic experiences which, unrecognized and, therefore, untreated, would fester in secrecy from childhood onward until they manifested as compulsive drives or inhibitive complexes. He invented deranged emotions which you describe as 'guilt' and 'shame' and he showed how they would cause buried memories to erupt in changed form, lead to cankerous misunderstandings, cause unhealthy repressions, and foster frustrations.

"But his master-stroke—and this was pure genius, for it was almost inconceivable—was when he traced the development of his 'nontelepathic civilization' to the point where he predicted criminals, criminal and moral codes of unbelievable complexity, and a great multitude of harmful and illogical taboos, local customs, and regional superstitions. It was a superb achievement of creative imagination and scientific deduction—but not even its creator thought it was more than an exercise in fantasy and perhaps not in the best of taste. The basic assumption was simply too absurd for serious consideration."

"Yeah. I guess we were as indigestible to you as you are to me. Maybe I'm getting over it. Sorry . . . uh . . . Homer."

"Call me Tim. I don't think of myself as Homer and my Challon identification is a mental-verbal linkage. Even 'Challon' is a compromise simplification."

"I guess it would be. Those cracks I made—"

"Forget them. To what you call the hag-ridden moron jittering out of sight in your mind, so many things equate to a threat to survival. And so many survival reactions outlast their usefulness, becoming essentially antisocial and antisurvival. For a telepathic race there are no false fronts or motives or impulses. In a nontelepathic society, nothing but false faces are ever seen."

"It's beginning to get home to me . . . what about that night near the swamp?"

"My poor Challonari. The shockwave of 'my' death left it alert but bewildered. It could not recognize nontelepathic intelligences and tried to turn them aside like the first one. Their deaths are on my head—or on the organic dust that eight years ago was a Challon. The Challonari was confused by the contradictions of my present identity, subtly altered as it has been by Homer's channeling mind, and went insane when faced with a basic conflict of duties. It was like . . . losing a simple child."

"So we return to Timmy."

"And to you."

"Me? I'm going downhill fast. Let's have it before I hit rock-bottom and *really* get around to reacting. And let's have a few straight answers. You could have by-passed the first block that makes Timmy an idiot. O. K., why didn't you?"

"I would have lost control of him

at once, of course. For one thing, as an ordinary child his mind would be closed to me just as yours is and I would be a voiceless animal with no protector, my existence likely to end at the bottom of a river in a weighted sack."

"No dice. Remember, I know you too well to believe you'd place your own interests first, much as I hate to admit it."

"As Homer I might, survival being a basic drive. As the Challon-Homer, however, I needed a better reason than simple self-preservation. I have that better reason. It lies in you, in Timmy, and in all your kind. Perhaps you'll see the connection when I tell you that although the Challon are the most intelligent race yet known to exist, Homo sapiens is *at present* not far behind them. Only more efficient communication and the great strides that it makes possible has advanced the Challon culture and science so disproportionately far beyond your own."

"So the Challon are a bit brighter and a lot more advanced than we are. O. K., they seem like a good bunch . . . or are they? Come to think of it, I saw them from your viewpoint which was predisposed to favor them." Another thought struck him and he fell silent for a moment. "You say we are almost their equal *at present*. What happens—if this inhibited potential you speak of—is released—if Man is made whole?"

The answer came quietly.

"You would have no equal in the known universe."

Phil's face grew thoughtful, sober, while the Challon-Homer watched through Tim's eyes the progress of a calculated gamble.

"Would the Challon—resent—our becoming superior?"

"For the same reason that the present Challon superiority is not resented by races of lower intelligence, they would not themselves resent the appearance of intellects far greater than their own."

"I have a feeling there's a lot more in that answer than meets the eye. Can you estimate to what extent we would surpass the Challon?"

"If my Challon memory serves me, they had no knowledge of any mind-structure of a capacity remotely approaching that of Man. It is a maze, incredibly complex, with far-reaching resources I can only guess at. The Challon part of my mind has the profoundest admiration for a superb mechanism it can only dimly comprehend, but beneath the Challon" —the voice dropped almost to a whisper—"beneath the Challon is the dog, and the dog sees his god." The power of that factor he had not considered.

Phil laughed uneasily, both shocked and repelled.

"I hope you're joking. We sound like the sweet-smelling Flower of Creation! When a dog reaches the level you . . . um . . . Homer has, it becomes Man's equal, not his pet."

"Until Man's advance thrusts the dog back to an even lower relative position, as it inevitably must when . . . if . . . Man comes into his own. I told you I dared not leave myself isolated and speechless by clearing the simple short-circuit immobilizing Timmy. Now you see why I dared not go even farther and release—untrained *and with no hope of adequate training*—the true Homo superior, the transcendent man."

"That's like turning a tiger loose in a kindergarten! Give a man a really high-powered intellect and for all his shortcomings—"

"The intellect is nothing. The data, the circumstances, the influences, the environment that shape the intellect, *these* are what count. Your theorists say that although Man may some day create wonderful mechanical brains with a creative capacity almost equal to Man's own, you can never create a brain that is your superior. That is true, and the reasoning is obvious. In a more limited sense, your body repairs itself daily but it cannot improve on itself, it cannot spontaneously develop functions it never had —*it cannot even repair severe damage without outside help*. The same applies to the mind. A sick mind cannot achieve the objectivity needed to repair itself, if the damage is too great. No, the intellect is nothing until it learns. What would Timmy have learned, and from whom? Take a minute to think of *all* the connotations." Phil thought of some of them, uneasily. "Assume that from the start his status as Homo superior was recognized . . . is that a fair assumption?"

"It . . . ah . . . would sooner or later become apparent."

"After how much damage had been done that could not be undone, since Homo sapiens cannot ever be competent to guide and train Homo superior?"

"Well . . . what about what he could learn from your Challon mind?"

"I would have no voice and no assurance that telepathy would be possible. No influence that I could exert on him at any time could hold him, if other factors impelled him to break free. A few months ago I recalled a formula known to the Challon and with nothing more than household chemicals prepared the quick and harmless anaesthetic I used with you. What brought it to mind was a side-reaction reported as a curiosity in one of the scientific journals Jerr . . . Dad subscribes to. It had an unexpected side-reaction for me, too, making direct telepathic contact possible with you, but only under difficult and limited conditions."

"There's a fortune in that alone—"

"That was an unworthy thought, Phil, typical of insecurity. I dare not turn loose an immature, untrained, Homo superior, the only one of his kind."

"But why the only one? Why not others as well so that they could work in unison?"

"Don't you understand yet? *You are not sane!* This planet is a hell-house of disordered personalities, a place of horror, a plague-spot. Suppose I had retained Timmy as my voice and planned on releasing the inhibited potential of many people. I would have to start with one man *and that one man would at once become my master!* If he wished, he could be the master of all the earth. Could I risk that?"

"We have men of good moral character—"

"By what standards acceptable to all? A good churchman, perhaps, whose first thought would be to bring everyone into the saving grace of his religion? Or an atheist, who would take care that no rascally churchman got the upper hand? Can you think of any man who does not have strong opinions on at least one subject? Who does not have one thing that he is a little bit more afraid of than anything else? One man who could be raised to power first and not insist on at least one positive or negative qualification for all who were permitted to follow? Something they must either be or not be? Yourself, for example.

"Would you suggest that a Russian be chosen first? Or a Frenchman or an Englishman? Or am I wrong in thinking you would 'naturally' want one of your own countrymen to be chosen, purely as a precaution? But which one of your countrymen? Among all your acquaintances, is there even one whom you would trust not to react emotionally on at least one count, thus automatically rendering him unfit to play god? Bearing in mind that the

first human being to find his full potential placed at his command will be a titan with the power to prevent any peer being raised to oppose him, would you feel safe with the choice of anyone except—yourself?"

"Are we that bad?"

"At birth, no, but from birth onward you are exposed to infection and you sicken to a greater or lesser degree depending on the concentration of infection around you. Let me answer you this way. Suppose the spaceship were found and examined, what would happen? Among other tools there is a prospecting instrument on board that is a rough approximation of a disintegration beam—it punches neat holes in solid rock by a process that leaves an exceedingly heavy dust behind—for a short while. Then something happens to the molecular bonds of the heavy dust, and the little holes become very big holes. Its principles would take you some years to work out, but its manufacture and operation are fairly obvious. What would be the fate of that very useful tool?"

"I can't deny that its possibilities as a weapon would be seized upon, but with such a weapon—"

"Ah, yes—no one would dare to go to war. At any rate, not with the country possessing the weapon."

"It could stop all war."

"If your part of the world threatened the other part of the world and put a halo around the 'or else'. What would the other part of the world do when the first news of the spaceship leaked out, as it would do immediately?"

"O. K.—I guess you know as well as I do."

"I'm not trying to ride you, Phil, but I want you to see that Fear and a desire for the security you can never know in your present state dominate almost every important act. As a people, a race, a species, you are unsane. What am I to do? To die in peace, leaving you as you are, without hope or help, is against every Challon instinct. To leave unrealized the human potential with its tremendous promise is unthinkable. Your race might destroy itself before your secret is rediscovered millennia from now, and the greatest wonder of creation be lost forever. Even the spaceship which I have failed to destroy with its innocent secrets, could destroy you simply by being found. What am I to do?"

"I . . . think you already have an answer."

"Yes, with your consent and only with your consent."

"You have it."

"You don't know—"

"You have it, I said. I trust you."

"Man puts his faith in Dog? Well, it will not be for the first time. Remember us, Man, when you come into your own. Now—I must invade your mind, without reserve. You understand? Nothing known to you will be unknown to me. Are you willing?"

"Another of those Mickey Finns?"

"Yes, it is the only way. I will

plant certain inflexible prohibitions which will forever destroy your self-will in regard to certain courses of action—they will be ones which you might at some time feel to be wise, but which I know to be ultimately destructive. In return, I can give you a measure of sanity greater than you have known. You will lose your hags, but you will never be entirely your own master again. You will follow the course I have planned for you for the rest of your life. It is the best I can do with my limited ability, and I cannot guarantee that I am doing what is right."

"And Timmy?"

"I have already seeded in his memory banks—a careful and painstaking job this time!—all the memories and knowledge appropriate to the boy his parents think him to have been, plus other information which will become available to him at the right time. Every day for eight years I gave him the memories for that day, planning for the time when I could pay my debt by releasing him."

"You take eight years that were otherwise useless to him and give him the rest of his life for his own. Fair enough."

"No, his life is not his own. It belongs to his whole race. Your work will be to supervise his training until the time is ripe, and then to awaken the dormant memories that will tell him what has happened between us."

"How do I do that?"

"Think of it as long-term post-hypnotic suggestion. It is one of the least complicated matters to arrange. A simple, spoken phrase that you will not remember until the right moment will be sufficient to trigger the memory release. We must hurry now. Homer's breathing—can you hear it? His lungs have almost failed. After I enter your mind, my last act will be to release the simple block that makes Timmy an imbecile . . . he will awaken and not know that he has slept all his life until this moment when he becomes in actuality an ordinary, quite intelligent boy. He will not grieve unduly for Homer, and I who have two bodies and am at home in neither of them will be a record that will finally be erased. Are you ready?"

"No—wait. I must know what all this is leading to!"

"We have so little time! Well, then, it is leading to broken hearts, to hatred, and to injustice. Perhaps to martyrdom, perhaps to glory. If my plans fail, your lot will be public anathema as a fool or a murderer, for I will prohibit you from ever clearing yourself by speaking the truth about it."

"Who would believe it!"

"Enough would become curious. A little research along the right lines and you would prematurely learn your own secret. Then a race of mad demigods would be loosed through the void, an all-conquering scourge instead of a blessing. I would sooner have your whole race die with your very existence unsuspected, than have you live in infamy, the unchecked tyrants of the stars. Not even the

Challon could stand against you, nor could they coerce a single one of you whose whole potential had been released."

"Then what hope—"

"Timmy's newly-awakened mind will be completely sane. The aids I have given it may keep it sufficiently sane for the next few years, despite infection on all sides. In those years you will watch over him and accumulate the funds that will be needed. That will not be difficult. You must buy the lands surrounding the spaceship and build a laboratory where you will conduct some dangerous experiments, thus explaining the need for an isolated location. The laboratory is only a blind. The ship must be freed from the swamp and repaired in some minor respects, then an 'accidental explosion' one night will destroy the buildings to cover the take-off. Timmy will be presumed killed in the explosion. His parents will grieve, the public may blame you, and you will sink into obscurity. You may live long enough to learn whether Timmy ever succeeded in reaching Challon in a spaceship not designed for his race. My memories and implanted commands will constantly guide and instruct him—"

"How . . . how old must he be?"

"As young as possible. As soon as all is ready. Tomorrow, if that were possible."

"A child!"

"For at least a little while he will be more than the equal of a 'good' man. Child, or youth, or man, I will free him from fear and loneliness on the long voyage. If he reaches Challon, they will understand and perhaps not think I have blundered too badly. They will heal him, study him, free him. Then it will be his problem to free his race. If you are very lucky, you may still be alive at that time."

"And if he never reaches—"

"You will never know. Are you ready?"

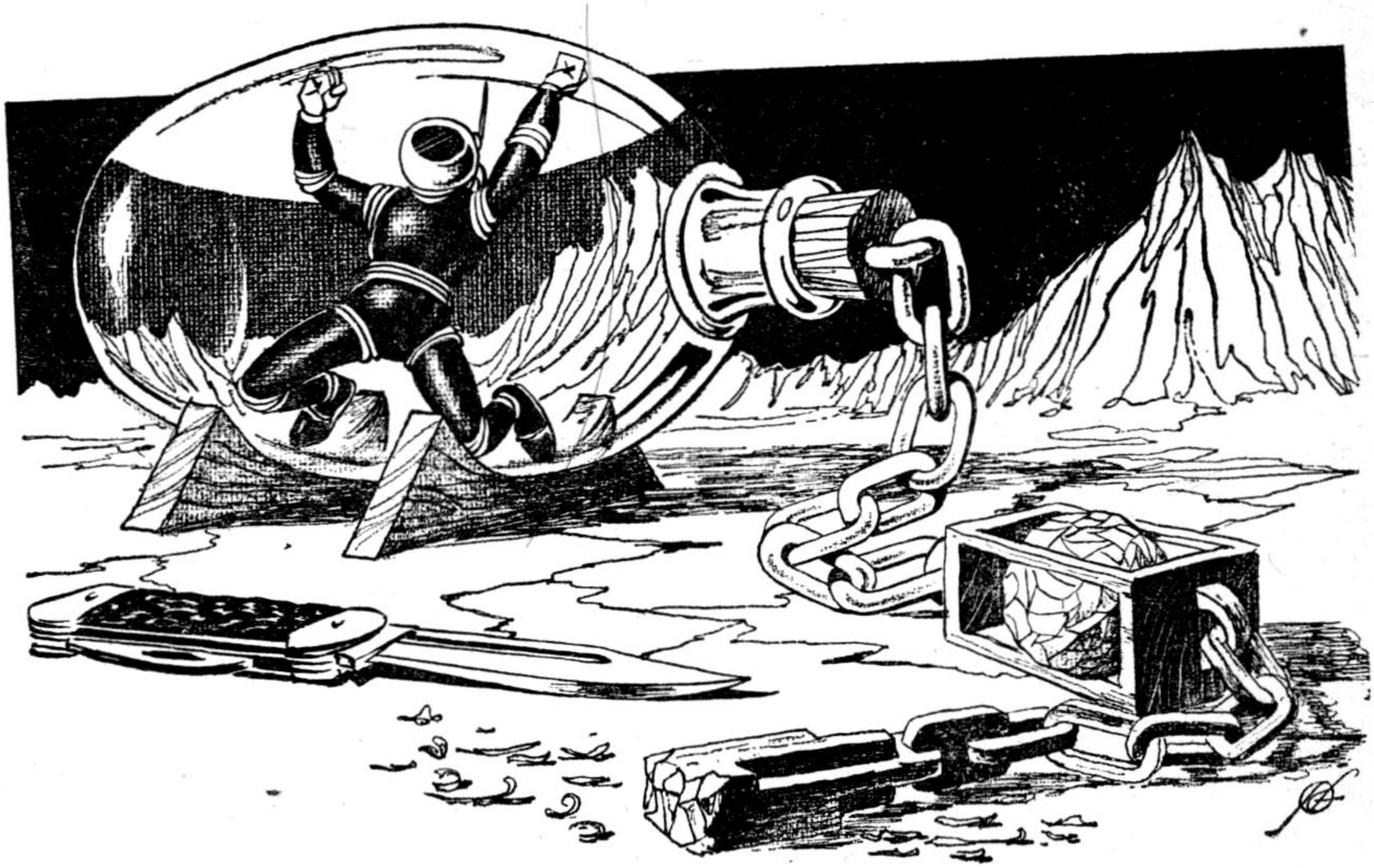
Phil looked desperately at the setting sun and the long, long shadows, as though he were a doomed man awaiting execution.

"Get on with it," he said huskily.

Very little happened. There was a small lapse of time during which an observer would have seen certain lines of tension vanish almost magically from the man's face—might even have thought that some years seemed to drop from his age. Presently the man roused himself, stretching with the careless vigor of a youth as he experienced a serene peace of mind that he had not known since he was very young indeed. He glanced casually at the boy seated near him—a boy who looked at the world with an air of fleeting puzzlement—then dropped on his knees and cradled an ugly, grizzled head in his arms. A last flicker enlivened the eyes and a dry tongue touched his hand just once.

That was all.

THE END



SECURITY

If you let a man learn, and study, and work—and clamp a lid on so that nothing he takes into his mind can be let out—one way or another he'll blow a safety valve!

BY ERNEST M. KENYON

Illustrated by Freas

Suddenly Collins snapped the pencil between his fingers and hurled the pieces across the lab, where they clattered, rolled from the bench to the floor, and were still. For a moment he sat leaning against the desk, his hands trembling. He wasn't sure just when the last straw had been added, but he was sure that he had had enough. The restrictions, red tape, security measures of these government laboratories seemed to close in on his mind in boiling, chaotic waves of frustration. What was the good of his work, all this great installation, all the gleaming expensive equipment in the lab around him? He was alone. None of them seemed

to share his problem, the unctuous, always correct Gordon, the easy-mannered, unbearable Mason, all of them gave him a feeling of actual physical sickness.

Gardner's "Nucleonics and Nuclear Problems" lay open on the desk before him, but he looked instead beyond through the clear curving glass windows toward the sweep of green hills and darkening sky and the shadows of the lower forests that gave Fair Oaks its name. Beside him unfinished lay the summaries of the day's experiments, and the unorganized, hurriedly jotted notes for tomorrow's work. The old intellectual alertness was gone. Delight in changing theory, in careful experimentation no longer sprang from his work and were a part of it. There was a dull, indefinable aching in his head and a dry, dissatisfied sensation in his mouth.

Along the ordered walks below his laboratory windows workers and technicians streamed toward the gates, checking out for the day through the usual mass of red tape, passes, and Geiger tests. Lights were flicking on in the long East Wing Dormitory across the quadrangle, and the mess hall, where he had recently eaten a tasteless supper, was lighted.

Shortly after restrictions had really begun to tighten up last fall, he had written to a worker who had published making a minor correction in his calculations and adding some suggestions arising from his own research. A week later his letter was returned completely censored, stamped "Security-Violation." It was that evasive Gordon's fault. He knew it, but he couldn't prove it. Collins suspected that the man was not a top-notch researcher and so was in administration. Perhaps Gordon was jealous of his own work.

Even the Journals were drying up. Endless innocuous papers recalculating the values of harmless constants and other such nonsense were all that was being published. They were hardly worth reading. Others were feeling the throttling effects of security measures, and isolated, lone researchers were slowing down, listless and anemic from the loss of the life blood of science, the free interchange of information.

The present research job he was doing was coming slowly, but what difference did it make? It would never be published. Probably it would be filed with a Department of Defense code number as Research Report DDNE-42 dash-dash-dash. And there it would remain, top-secret, guarded, unread, useless. Somewhere in the desk drawers was the directive worded in the stiff military manner describing the procedures for clearing papers for publication. When he had first come here, he had tried that.

"Well, good, Collins," Gordon, the Division Administrator, had said, "glad to check it over. Always happy when one of our men has something for publication. Gives the Division a good name. I'll let you know, but we have to be careful. Security you know."

Somehow he had never heard. The first time he had made a pest of himself with Gordon who was polite, evasive, always plausible. Gordon, Gordon—it was becoming an obsession with him he knew, but the man appeared at every turn. He personified the system.

In the past months his work had seemed to clog up in details and slow down. The early days of broad, rapid outlines and facile sketching in of details were gone. Now the endless indignities, invasion of personal rights and freedom, the hamstringing of his work, the feeling of being cut off from the main currents of his field, filled him with despair, anger, and frustration.

Suddenly he raised his head, slammed the notebook shut and switched off the desk lamp. Not tonight. Tomorrow would be time enough to write out this stuff. He needed a drink.

The hall was dark as he locked the door to his lab except at the far end near the stairway where a patch of yellow light shown through an open doorway. Mason, he thought, Allan Mason, the one guy at Fair Oaks Nuclear Energy Laboratories who was always so damnedly cheerful, who didn't seem to mind the security restrictions, and who was seen so often with Gordon. As he walked rapidly past the open doorway, he caught a flashing impression from the corner of his eye of Mason's tall figure bent over his bench, his long legs wrapped around a lab stool, the perpetual unlit pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth. Then as he swung quickly toward the stairs, he heard Mason's cheerful hail.

"Hi, Milt, hold up a sec."

Reluctantly he paused at the head of the stairs scowling momentarily, and then slowly turning and retraced his steps.

The lab was brightly lighted, and Mason stretched and smiled pleasantly.

"Come in, old man, I'm about ready to knock off for the evening. How goes it?"

Collins mumbled an O. K. trying to keep the irritation out of his voice, and Mason went on.

"Just finishing up some loose ends so I can get off to the Society meeting on Monday. You going?"

Shaking his head Collins felt his dislike for this man growing. The annual meeting of the North American Society of Theoretical Physicists. He didn't even give it any thought any more. Maybe he could go, but it didn't seem worth the effort. In the past he had tried to go to the meetings, but somehow work, rush work, some change of emphasis had come up on the project, and he had had to cancel his plans. He'd finally given up, but with Mason these things seemed to come easily, and he wondered why—

"That's too bad"—his voice droned pleasantly on, and Collins' eye caught several botany texts in the book rack above Mason's desk. So, he had time to read stuff outside

of his field. His work was going well. He had time for meetings and was allowed to go to them—the anger rose slowly like a swelling bubble from the hard core of his stomach. Then he realized that Mason had stopped talking and was looking at him.

"Milt, you look glum tonight. Is there— Why not have supper with me, and we'll take in the movie in the lounge?"

"I've eaten already." Collins was on his feet. He forced a, "Thanks anyway. See you tomorrow. I'm—" and he was gone.

As he strode angerly across the quadrangle Mason's words and cheerful attitude rankled in his mind. The gravel of the walk spurted from under his shoes, and the night air was clear and cool. It was good at least to feel something other than despair again, even anger.

But once in his study with its attached bedroom and bath that made up his living quarters, he sank to the couch near his desk, all of the fight gone. He needed a drink. Today all the irritations, tensions, and suspicions of the past months seemed to close in on him. His work was going badly. Perhaps seeing Mason had brought it to a head. The fifth of bourbon in the bottom desk drawer was partly gone from the party last month. He took a swallow neat, and the fire of the liquid burned and clawed its way down his throat and spread with blossoming warmth in his stomach.

Kicking off his shoes and loosening his tie he leaned back with the bottle on the floor beside him.

Later in the evening when the early clarity of thought had left him and his mind moved disjointedly in and out of seemingly brilliant, emotional solutions to his problem, he knew he must have a showdown. Lying back on the couch he drifted into sleep determined to have it out with Gordon in the morning—resign if necessary.

The momentary pause of lighting his cigarette gave Collins a chance to decide where to start, as he sat across from Gordon. The Division Administrator was older with a heavy-jowled, close shaven face, and he waited patiently for Collins to speak.

"Dr. Gordon, I am having a great deal of difficulty in making an adjustment both in my work and in my personal relations here at Fair Oaks, and last night I realized that I would have to talk to you about it."

Gordon's face changed slightly, his eyebrows rising almost imperceptibly.

"So, what . . . how do you mean, Milt?"

Use of the first name—the familiar approach thought Collins—administrative technique number blank blank dash blank.

"Dr. Gordon, these security measures we are under, the difficulty of publishing, of getting to scientific meetings, the problem of getting furloughs, lack of knowledge of what is going on in my own field,

it's just a little too much. It's personally irritating, but it greatly hampers my work as well. Frankly, I'm against the entire security program as it now stands. If it isn't stopped research will . . . well, simply be impossible. Free interchange of information is essential to—" His fingers were gripping the arms of his chair.

"Yes, of course, Milt, but corny as it sounds there is a war on you know. Oh, not a war with military weapons—yet, but a cold war of science and engineering, a struggle for supremacy in many fields of knowledge. If information of our work leaks out, gets to the enemy, we might as well not do that work. We can't be too careful."

"I agree, but it goes too far." He leaned forward. "My private mail is read, and on my last furlough I am certain I was watched from the time I left the gates out there until I returned, and I don't like it. I can't prove it, but— That's getting to the point that life's not worth while."

"Come now, Milt, don't you think you're taking this a little too seriously? You're getting stale, overwrought. You need a fresh point of view. Lots of our people feel as you do at one time or another, but most of us learn to live with these necessary regulations, and do our work in spite of them. Let me make a suggestion, relax, take a little time off, develop a hobby. Why not do some reading in a field of science other than your own. It's good for you. Several of the people here are doing it. I do it, Carter, even Mason for instance—"

Collins could feel the anger rising in him again.

"Look, Gordon, I'm not going to mince words. I'm sick and tired of this mess, and you might as well know it. You can have all your damn relaxations and hobbies, or what have you. I want to do my work, and if I can't do it here, I'm going somewhere where I can do it. In plain English unless we can have an understanding right now—I resign."

It had come out, and Collins was breathing hard, but Gordon's expression hardly changed as he looked over the tips of his joined fingers, while the younger man stopped and crushed out his cigarette viciously in the ash disposer on the arm of his chair. Gordon doodled on a small pad for a moment, his eyes not meeting Collins'. Then he spoke slowly.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Milt. I . . . I'm afraid I cannot accept your resignation. You see," he said softly, "none of us can leave Fair Oaks —now."

Collins looked up, amazement and incredulity written on his face.

"What do you mean—can't leave? I can leave any time—"

Gordon slowly shook his head almost sadly. "No, only assistants, technicians, maintenance people, and they are carefully watched or restricted to this area. People like yourself, like me, we have information, knowledge which cannot be let out of government hands at this time.

We're here probably for the 'duration'; maybe longer."

"But—this is barbarous. I—" the words clogged, jumbled as he tried to get them out. His emotions ran from anger, to amazement, to indignation, followed by a trickle of fear, and as he stared at Gordon, the fear grew. He could scarcely hear Gordon's words—

"Take my advice—relax—and forget your fears—accept the restrictions and go ahead—read in some other field—come in again when you've thought it out." He was scarcely aware when Gordon slipped a bound journal volume into his hands and walked with him to the door—and closed it behind him.

Collins left Gordon's office in Administration moving slowly, one arm hanging loosely by his side, the other clutching the book. The corridor stretched ahead into B Wing with its laboratories flooded with the glow of mid-morning sunshine, bright and unreal. His mind was dazed, his thinking processes stopped in a kind of stunned unbelief. He could not even quit now. An undercurrent of fear ran close to the surface of his confused mind. It was the end of science, the end of all his work. All of the stifling, strangling restrictions of security on his work, on his private life, came whirling back as a monstrous, formless threat, something unspeakably big and powerful and unbeatable against which he could not fight.

To his right as he moved slowly down the hall the double doors of the main library reading room were open with the stacks and study cubicles beyond, silent and restful. He paused and then entered crossing into the maze of the stacks through a grilled iron doorway. The important thing now was not to meet anyone, not to have to speak or smile or think. It was very important now to be alone and quiet.

He walked until he found an empty cubicle, the endless walls of books, repositories of knowledge, silent and reproachful around him. Knowledge and books such as these would soon be added to no longer. He slumped into the chair and gazed at the tiny reading desk with its softly glowing lamp and the small stack of volumes on the rack left by previous users. Absently he stared for a long time at the volume Gordon had given him as if seeing it for the first time. Then with a deliberate effort he opened it and thumbed through slowly only half seeing its pages. *The Journal of Botanical Research.*

The pages in the *Journal* were like a look through an open window. Outside of classified projects in "harmless" fields of research the work of science went on, papers were published, reputations were made, freedom still existed. He remembered Gordon's sleek smile and advice to relax and read in other fields. This stupid useless advice still rankled. Of course, he probably was stale, but to read junk like this!

Silently and in his mind he cursed

the day he had studied physics, better archeology or zoology, anything. Suddenly he stopped riffling the pages and leaned forward, rapidly turning back to something that had caught his eye. It was a three and one-half page paper on "The Statistical Probability of Chromosome Crossover" written in neat sections with several charts and references. It was by M. Mason.

Something clicked in Collins' mind—read the journals—Mason's unconcern with security, the botany books on his desk the night before. It didn't make sense, but it added up to something. Mason knew something and so did Gordon. He half rose. He had to get to the bottom of it. Clutching the bound *Journal* Collins turned and weaved through the stacks and out of the library waving the protesting librarian aside and strode down the corridor toward the laboratories.

The door to Mason's lab was partially open, and he looked up quizzically from taking an instrument reading as Collins burst in.

"Mason, I—" he planked the bound volume of the *Botanical Journal* on the lab bench beside the instrument ignoring Mason's wince as the instrument needle quivered with the jar. "Did you write this?" His finger jabbed at the open page.

Mason glanced at Collins, removed a pair of glasses from his white lab coat pocket, and putting them on leaned forward and studied the page for a moment.

"Yes. Not bad either though I shouldn't say it. I didn't know you were interested in Botany." His voice was casual with a slight questioning note.

Collins suddenly felt ridiculous. What was he accusing the man of? Mason had a right to publish on anything he wanted to, still a muddled series of half facts, incidents and suspicions chased through his mind.

Mason walked over to his desk and filling his pipe sat down thoughtfully and leaned back motioning Collins into a nearby chair.

"I think I know what is on your mind, Milt. Maybe I can straighten this out. Gordon told me a little while ago that you wanted to resign."

Collins stiffened. So, these two were working together.

"Milt, did you ever stop to think how lucky we are? Where can you get better equipment, help, coöperation in the country than here?" Collins leaned forward to speak, but Mason went on. "Oh, I know all the problems of security and how it strangles work." He paused for a moment as though trying to grasp the right words.

"Look, Milt, what's the basic problem? Why do security measures strangle research? Isn't it a matter basically of a breakdown in the interchange of ideas? Sure, and it has come about because there has been no method of communication which would not get to and be used by our enemies. So, like yourself, I'm forbidden to publish the results of my

work here in the journals. Why? Because those results are in my field of study, chain reactions.

"I'm frustrated just as you have been and science suffers. What do I do? I write articles in a field that isn't restricted, botany. It's a new field of interest to me, a hobby if you like. The stuff is published and gets wide distribution. Every decent library in the country gets it. Every scientist all over the country can read the papers if he cares to. Then the word gets around, by the scientific grapevine, with a little judicious ear-bending. I get a reputation—in Botany.

"Now the botanists know that I am not a botanist. They understand what I am doing. The word spreads, and they leave my stuff alone. The physicists in my specialty know my name, and they get the word, and pretty soon they are glancing over certain botany journals apparently for relaxation. They read my papers. It's slow, but it works." Mason leaned forward and struck a large stick match under the lab bench top. Drawing several puffs through his pipe his eyes were on Collins' confused face. Then he laid the pipe down.

"The enemy botanists may read the botany journals, sure, but the enemy physicists don't. Their totalitarian training has made them inflexible in their thinking, besides they have their hands full trying to keep up in their own fields. The curse of specialization is a blessing to us. When the enemy botanists read it, it makes sense, but it doesn't help them much in their work—more or less innocuous." He waved toward the botany texts on his desk. "It took me six months to learn enough about it to do the job." As he spoke Mason untangled his legs and brought the open journal over to his desk.

"All right, notice in my article I am writing on chromosomes—chains of genes, and my field is—?"

"Chain reactions," Collins finished softly, "but—"

"The article itself is well disguised, but it's a parable. It's botany on the surface, but it gets over enough chain-reaction theory to be good physics, if you read it right. You see botany is what you might call my code field."

The bright light of noon shimmered on the white buildings and green lawns beyond the lab windows. Collins was silent and thoughtful.

"Well, that's about all. Gordon knows. He's in with us, but the Government doesn't suspect—yet. Oh, they may catch on to us. Information may leak out to the enemy. There's some chance, but when we're caught we'll think of something else. Most of us believe it's worth the chance. There's a risk in anything."

Suddenly all the pieces fell into place, and Collins' anger and confusion melted away. In its place was a sense of relief and hope, hope for the future. It wasn't the final answer, but it was a way to keep going. He was not alone any longer. He had friends who understood, who had been through what he had been

through. It was a good feeling. He heard Mason's voice again.

"Milt, why don't you do some library work? Botany's my code field. I don't know what yours is, but you've got some catching up to do. There may be some interesting stuff published already in your code field."

Collins did, and he developed his new interest enthusiastically. Gordon had been right. He had been getting stale. Besides, astronomy was a fascinating field, and suns with their revolving planets in some respects are very like atomic systems, if you look at it that way.

THE END

IN TIMES TO COME

Next month, Frank Herbert starts a new serial, "Under Pressure." This will, I think, be one of the memorable yarns of science fiction; it's a story of wartime pressure, in two different senses—and both carried to the creaking, grinding extreme. The psychological pressures in an atomic-powered submarine, with a tiny crew, towing a vast subsurface cargo, is little if any less than the violence of the hydrostatic pressure in the icy night a mile straight down.

And as Herbert points out—a spaceship is no more remote, no more a bubble of tolerable environment in a vast darkness, than is a submarine.

Particularly a submarine with the happy certainty that there is, on board, at least one saboteur.

THE EDITOR.

NEW BLOOD

It would be very dangerous indeed to have something of inestimable value that could not be communicated, taught, or known by any other human being! If you had immortality, but didn't know how or why, for instance . . .

BY JAMES E. GUNN

Illustrated by Freas

The young man was stretched out flat on the padded hospital table, his bare left arm muscular and brown on the table beside him. The wide, flat band of a sphygmomanometer was tight around his bicep, and the inside of his elbow, where the veins were blue traceries, had been washed with soap and water, swabbed with alcohol, stained brown with iodine.

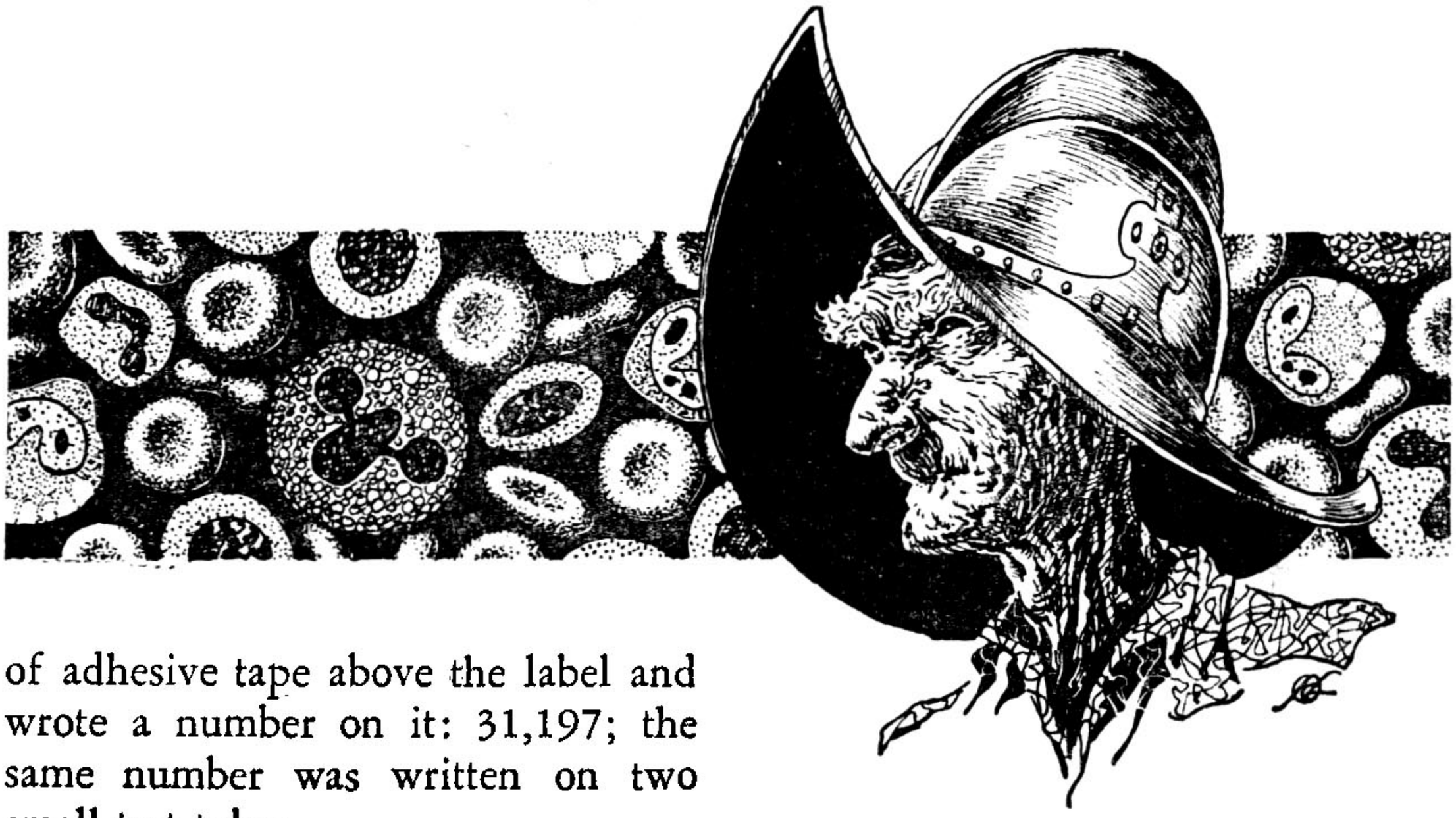
His eyes followed the quick efficiency of the technician. Her movements were as crisp as the white uniform.

She opened the left-hand door of the big, old refrigerator and took an empty brown bottle from the second shelf. There was a handle at the bottom, fastened to the bottle by a metal band; it was raised now. Swishing beneath it was an inch of sodium citrate. The rest was vacuum.

The technician broke the tab, stripped off the metal cap, exposing the rubber gasket. From a cardboard box beneath the table she pulled a few feet of plastic tubing. At each end it had a needle. One went into the donor's procaine-deadened vein. The other was thrust through the gasket into the bottle.

Dark-red blood raced through the tube, spurted into the bottle; the sodium citrate swirled pinkly. A moment later it was the color of grape juice, frothing at the top.

The technician printed the date and the donor's name in the spaces provided on the label. At the bottom she put her initials. She stuck a piece



of adhesive tape above the label and wrote a number on it: 31,197; the same number was written on two small test tubes.

"Keep making a fist," she said, turning the bottle.

When the bottle was full, she closed a clamp on the tube and pulled the needle from the bottle. A square of gauze and a strip of tape replaced the needle in the donor's arm. She drained the blood in the tubing into the test tubes and slipped them into pockets in a tiny cloth apron hung over the neck of the bottle.

The tubing and needles were tossed away, and a strip of tape was pressed over the top of the bottle.

At the workbench by the window, the technician dabbed three blood samples onto two glass slides, one divided into sections marked A and B. She slipped them onto a light-box with a translucent glass top; to one sample she added a drop of clear serum from a green bottle marked "Anti-A" in a commercial rack. "Anti-B" came from a brown bottle; "Anti-Rh" from a clear one.

She rocked the box back and forth on its pivots. The donor was sitting up now, watching her with interested eyes.

Sixty seconds later the red cells of the samples marked A and B were still evenly suspended. In the third sample, the cells had clumped together visibly.

"You're O-neg all right," the technician said. She scribbled it across the label and on the strip of tape that sealed the top of the pint of blood.

The donor's young lips twisted at the corners.

"Valuable," the technician said briskly, making out a card and then a slip of paper. "Only kind we buy. Shall we put you on our professional donor's list?"

Without hesitation the young man shook his head.

The technician shrugged. She handed him the card. "Thanks anyway. Here's your blood type. Stay

seated in the waiting room for ten minutes. The paper is a voucher for twenty-five dollars. You can cash it at the cashier's office—by the front door as you go out."

For a moment after the young man's broad back had disappeared from the doorway, the technician stared after him. Then she shrugged, turned, and slipped the pint of blood onto the refrigerator's top left-hand shelf for seriology tests.

A pint of whole blood—new life in a bottle for someone who might die without it. Within a few days the white cells will begin to die, the blood will decline in ability to clot. With the aid of refrigeration and the citrate solution, the red cells will last —some of them—for three weeks. After that the blood will be sent to the separator for the plasma or sold to a commercial company for separation of some of the plasma's more than seventy proteins, the serum albumin, the gamma globulins—

A pint of blood. Market price: $25. In a few hours it will be on the second shelf from the top, right-hand side of the refrigerator, with the other pints of O-type blood.

But this blood was special. It had everything other blood had and something extra that made it unique. There had never been any blood quite like it.

Twenty-five dollars? How much is life worth?

The old man was seventy years old. His body was limp on the hard hospital bed. In the sudden silence after the cut-out of the air-conditioner's gentle murmur, the harsh unevenness of his breathing was loud. The only movement in the private room was the spasmodic rise and fall of the sheet that covered the old body.

He was living—barely. He had used up his allotted threescore years and ten. It wasn't merely that he was dying. We all are. With him it was imminent.

Dr. Russell Pearce held one bony wrist in his firm, young right hand. His face was serious, his dark eyes steady, his tanned skin well molded over strong bones.

The old man's face was yellow over a grayish blue, the color of death. It was bony, the wrinkled skin pulled back like a mask for the skull. Once he might have been handsome. Now his eyes were sunken, the closed eyelids dark over them, and his nose was a thin, arching beak.

There is a kinship in age just as there is a kinship in infancy. Between the two, men differ, but at the extremes they are much the same.

Pearce had seen old men in the wards, charity cases most of them, picked up on the North Side, filthy, winos. The only differences with this man were a little care and a few million dollars. Where this man's hair was groomed snow, the others would be yellowish gray, long, scraggly on the seamed, thin necks. Where this man's skin was scrubbed and immaculate, the others would have rolled dirt in the wrinkles, sores in the crevices.

Pearce laid the arm gently down beside the body and slowly stripped

back the sheet. The differences were minor. In dying we are much the same. Once this old man had been tall, strong, vital. Now the thin body was emaciated; the rib case struggled through the skin, fluttered. The old veins stood out, knotted, ropy, blue, on the sticklike legs.

"Pneumonia?" Dr. Easter asked with professional interest. He was an older man, his hair gray at the temples, his appearance distinguished, calm.

"Not yet. Malnutrition. You'd think he'd eat more, get better care. Money is supposed to take care of itself."

"It doesn't follow. You don't order around a million dollars."

"Anemia," Pearce went on. "Bleeding from a duodenal ulcer, I'd guess. Pulse weak, rapid. Blood pressure low. Arteriosclerosis and all the damage that entails."

Beside him a nurse made marks on a chart. Her face was smooth and young; the skin glowed healthily.

"Let's have a blood count," Pearce said briskly. "Urinalysis. Requisition a pint of blood."

"Transfusion?" Easter asked, lifting a groomed eyebrow.

"It'll help—temporarily, anyway."

"But he's dying." It was almost half a question.

"Sure. We all are." Pearce smiled grimly. "Our business is to postpone it as long as we can."

When Pearce opened the door and stepped into the hall, Dr. Easter was talking earnestly to a tall, blond, broad-shouldered man in an expensively cut business suit. The man was about Easter's age, somewhere between forty-five and fifty. The face was strange: it didn't match the body. There was a thin, predatory look to it which was accentuated by slate-gray eyes.

The man's name was Carl Jansen. He was personal secretary to the old man who was dying inside the room. Dr. Easter performed the introductions, and the men shook hands. Pearce reflected that the term "personal secretary" might cover a multitude of duties.

"Dr. Pearce, I'll only ask you one question," Jansen said in a voice as flat and cold as his eyes. "Is Mr. Weaver going to die?"

"Of course he is," Pearce snapped. "None of us escape. If you mean is he going to die within the next few days, I'd say 'yes'—if I had to answer yes or no."

"What's wrong with him?" Jansen asked suspiciously.

"He's outlived his body. Think of it as a machine. It's worn out, falling apart, one organ failing after another."

"His father lived to be ninety-one, his mother ninety-six."

Pearce looked at Jansen steadily, unblinking. "They didn't make a million dollars. We live in an age that has almost conquered disease, but that has inflicted its price. The stress and strain of modern life tear us apart. Every million Weaver has made cost him five years of living."

"What are you going to do—just let him die?"

Pearce's eyes were just as cold as Jansen's. "As soon as possible we'll give him a transfusion. Does he have any relatives, close friends?"

"There's no one closer than me."

"We'll need two pints of blood for every pint we give Weaver. Arrange it."

"Mr. Weaver will pay for whatever he uses."

"He'll replace it if possible. That's the hospital rule."

Jansen's eyes dropped. "There'll be plenty of volunteers from the office."

When Pearce was beyond the range of his low, penetrating voice, Jansen said, "Can't we get somebody else? I don't like him."

"That's because he's harder than you are," Easter said easily. "He'd be a good match for the old man when he was in his prime."

"He's too young."

"That's why he's good. The best geriatrician in the Middle West. He can be detached, objective. All doctors need a touch of ruthlessness. Pearce needs more than most; he loses every patient sooner or later. He's got it." Easter looked at Jansen, smiling. "When men reach our age, they start getting soft. They start getting subjective about death."

The requisition for one unit of blood arrived at the blood bank. The hospital routine began. From the cluttered, makeshift cubicle on the first floor came a crisp technician. From one of the ropy veins she drew five cubic centimeters of blood, almost purple inside the slim barrel of the hypodermic.

The old man didn't stir. In the silence his breathing was a raucous noise.

Back at the workbench, she typed the blood sample quickly, efficiently. She wrote down the results on an 8½ by 11 printed form: patient's name, date, room, doctor—Type: O. Rh: neg.

Divided by a double-ruled line was a section headed "Donors." The technician opened the right-hand door of the refrigerator and inspected the labels of the bottles on the second shelf from the top. She selected one and transferred to the sheet the name of the donor, bottle number, type, and Rh factor.

She put samples of the donor's and the patient's blood into two small test tubes and spun them for a moment in the old centrifuge. When she removed them, the red cells were at the bottom of the straw-colored serum. She poured off the serum into separate test tubes.

A drop of donor's serum in a sample of the patient's blood provided the major crossmatch: it didn't make the red cells clump, and even under the microscope, after centrifuging, the cells were perfect, evenly suspended circles. A drop or two of patient's serum in a sample of the donor's blood and the minor crossmatch was done.

The technician signed the form and telephoned the nurse in charge that the blood was ready when needed. The nurse came for the blood in

a few minutes. The technician took out a red-bordered label. She wrote:

FOR 9-4
LEROY WEAVER
RM. 305 DR. PEARCE

She pasted it vertically on the pint of blood beside the original label. The nurse, nodding her appreciation, carried the bottle away casually, familiarly.

Dr. Pearce studied the charts labcled "Leroy Weaver." He picked up the report from the hematology laboratory. Red cell count: 2,360,000/cmm. Anemia, all right. Worse than he'd even suspected. That duodenal ulcer was losing a lot of blood.

The transfusion would help. It would be temporary, but everything is, at best. In the end, it is all a matter of time. Maybe it would revive Weaver enough to get some food down him. He might surprise them all and walk out of this hospital yet.

He picked up the charts and reports, and he walked down the long, quiet corridor, rubbery underneath, redolent of the perennial hospital odors: alcohol and ether, antiseptic and anaesthetic. He opened the door of Room 305, and he walked into the coolness.

He nodded distantly to the nurse on duty in the room, not one of the hospital staff. She was one of the three full-time nurses hired for Weaver by Jansen.

Pearce picked up the clip board at the foot of the bed and looked at it. No change. He studied the old man's face. It looked more like death. His breathing was still stertorous; his stained eyelids still veiled his sunken eyes.

What was he? Name him: Five Million Dollars. He was Money. He served no useful function; he contributed nothing to society, nothing to the race. He had been too busy to marry, too dedicated to father. His occupation: money-maker.

Pearce didn't believe that a man with money was necessarily a villain. But anyone who made a million dollars or a multiple of it was necessarily a large part predator and the rest magpie.

Pearce knew why Jansen was worried. When Weaver died, Money died, Power died. Money and Power are not immune from death, and when they fall they carry empires with them.

Pearce looked down at Weaver, thinking these things, and it didn't matter. He was still one of us, still human, still alive. That meant he was worth saving. No other consideration was valid.

Two pint bottles hung from the metal "T"—the clear, antiseptic, saline solution and the dark life fluid. A glass T-joint reduced two plastic tubes into one. Below was a transparent filter. At the end of the tube was a 20-gauge needle.

The nurse released the clamp closing the tube just below the saline solution. The salt water ran, bubbling a little, through the tubing, the joint —backing up to the clamp below the

blood—the filter, and spurted from the needle tip. The nurse clamped it off close to the needle.

Now the tubes were full. They were free of air bubbles that could be forced into the patient's veins to cause an embolism.

The clamp below the saline solution was closed off. The nurse waited while Pearce picked up the needle and studied Weaver's arm. No need bothering with procaine.

The antecubital vein was available, swollen across the inside of the elbow. Pearce swabbed it with alcohol and iodine, pushed in the needle with practiced ease, and taped it down. He nodded to the nurse.

She released the clamp under the blood. Slowly it stained the water, and then swirled darkly as she slowly eased open the bottom clamp. In a second it was all blood, running slowly through the long, transparent tubing into the receptive vein, new blood bringing new life to the old, worn-out mechanism on the hard hospital bed.

New blood for old, Pearce thought. *Money can buy anything.* "A little faster."

The nurse opened the bottom clamp a little wider. In the pint bottle, the level of the life fluid dropped faster.

Life. Dripping. Flowing. Making the old new.

The old man took a deep breath. The exhausted laboring of his chest got easier.

Pearce studied the old face, the beaklike nose, the thin, bloodless lips, looking cruel even in their pallor. New life, perhaps. But nothing can reverse the long erosion of the years. Bodies wear out. Nothing can make them new.

Drop by drop the blood flowed from the pint bottle through the tubing into an old man's ancient veins. Someone had given it or sold it. Someone young and healthy, who could make more purple life stuff, saturated with healthy red cells, vigorous white scavengers, platelets, the multiple proteins, who could replace it all in less than ninety days.

Pearce thought about Richard Lower, the Seventeenth Century English anatomist who performed the first transfusion, and the Twentieth Century Viennese immunologist, Karl Landsteiner, who made transfusions safe when he discovered the incompatible blood groups among human beings.

Now there was this old man, who was getting the blood through the efforts of Lower and Landsteiner and —he glanced inquisitively at the bottle and translated the upside-down printing into meaningfulness—a donor named Cartwright—this old man who needed it, who couldn't make the red cells fast enough any longer, who couldn't keep up with the rate he was losing them internally.

What was dripping through the tubes was life, a gift of the young to the old, of the healthy to the sick.

The old man's eyelids flickered.

When Pearce made his morning rounds, the old man was watching

him with faded blue eyes. Pearce blinked once and picked up the skin-and-bone wrist again and counted automatically. "Feeling better, eh?"

He got his second shock. The old man nodded.

"Fine, Mr. Weaver. We'll get a little food down you, and in a little while you'll be as good as new."

He glanced at his watch, looked away, and glanced back at it again. Gently, puzzledly, he lowered the old arm down beside the thin, sheeted body. He wrapped the wide, flat band of the sphygmomanometer around the stringy bicep and pumped it tight, listening at the inside of the elbow with his stethoscope. He looked at the gauge and let the air hiss out and listened for a moment at the old man's chest.

He sat back thoughtfully beside the bed, ignoring the bustling nurse. Weaver was making a surprising rally for a man in as bad shape as he had been. The pulse was strong and steady. Blood pressure was up. Somehow the transfusion had triggered hidden stores of energy and resistance.

Weaver was fighting back.

Pearce felt a strange and unprofessional feeling of elation.

Next day Pearce thought the eyes that watched him were not quite so faded. "Comfortable?" he asked. The old man nodded. His pulse was almost normal for a man of his age.

On the third day, Weaver started talking.

The old man's thready voice whispered disjointed and meaningless reminiscences. Pearce nodded understandingly, and he nodded, inwardly, to himself. Arteriosclerosis had left its mark: chronic granular kidney,

damage to the left ventricle of the heart, malfunction of the brain from a cerebral hemorrhage or two.

On the fourth day, Weaver was sitting up in bed talking to the nurse in a cracked, sprightly voice. "Yes-sirree," he said toothlessly. "That was the day I whopped 'em. Gave it to 'em good, I did. Let 'em have it right between the eyes. Always hated those kids. You must be the doctor," he said suddenly, turning toward Pearce. "I like you. Gonna see that you get a big check. Take care of people I like. Take care of those I don't like, too." He chuckled; it was an evil, childish sound.

"Don't worry about that," Pearce said gently, picking up Weaver's wrist. "Concentrate on getting well."

The old man nodded happily and stuck a finger in his mouth to rub his gums. "You'll git paid," he mumbled. "Don't *you* worry about that."

Pearce looked down at the wrist he was holding. It had filled out amazingly. "What's the matter with your gums?"

"Itch," Weaver got out around his finger. "Like blazes."

On the fifth day Weaver walked to the toilet.

On the sixth day he took a shower. When Pearce came in he was sitting on the edge of the bed, dangling his feet. Weaver looked up quickly as Pearce entered, his eyes alert, no longer so sunken. His skin had a subcutaneous glow of health. Like his wrist and arm, his face had filled out. Even his legs looked firmer, almost muscular.

He was taking the well-balanced hospital diet and turning it into flesh and fat and muscle.

With his snowy hair, he looked like an ad for everybody's grandfather.

Next day, his hair began to darken.

"How old are you, Mr. Weaver?" Pearce asked sharply.

"Seventy," Weaver said proudly. "Seventy my next birthday, June 5th. Born in Wyoming, boy, in a sod hut. Still Indians around then. Many's the time I seen 'em, out with my paw. Never give us no trouble, though. Timid bunch, mostly."

"What color was your hair?"

"Color of a raven's wing. Had the blackest, shiniest hair in the county. Gals used to beg to run their fingers through it." He chuckled reminiscently. "Used to let 'em."

He stuck his finger in his mouth and massaged his gums ecstatically.

"Still itch?" Pearce asked.

"Like a Wyoming chigger." He chuckled. "You know what's wrong with me, boy? In my second childhood. That's what. I'm cutting teeth."

During the second week, Weaver's mind turned to business, deserting the past. A telephone was installed beside his bed, and he spent half his waking time in short, clipped conversations about incomprehensible deals and manipulations. The other half was devoted to Jansen, who was so conveniently on hand whenever Weaver called for him that Pearce thought he must have appropriated a hospital room.

Weaver was picking up the reins of empire.

While his mind roamed restlessly over possessions, ways of keeping and augmenting them, his body repaired itself like a self-servicing mechanism. His first tooth came through—a canine. After that they appeared rapidly. His hair darkened almost perceptibly; within the week it was as dark as he had described. His face filled out, the wrinkles smoothing themselves like a ruffled lake when the wind has gentled. His body became muscular and vigorous; the veins retreated under the skin to become blue traceries. The eyes darkened to a fiery blue—

The lab tests were additional proof of what Pearce had begun to suspect. Arteriosclerosis had never thickened those veins or else, somehow, the damage of that fibrous tissue had been repaired. The kidneys functioned perfectly. The heart was as strong and efficient a pump as it had ever been. There was no evidence of a cerebral hemorrhage.

By the end of that week Weaver looked like a man of thirty. From birth, his body had aged no more than thirty years.

"Carl," Weaver was saying as Pearce entered the room, "I want a woman."

"That's easy," Jansen answered, shrugging. "Any particular one?"

"You don't understand," Weaver said bitingly. "I want one to marry. I made a mistake before; I'm not going to repeat it. A man in my position needs an heir. I'm going to have one. Yes, Carl—and you can hide that look of incredulity a little better—at my age!" He swung around quickly toward Pearce. "That's right, isn't it, doctor?"

Pearce shrugged. "There's no reason you can't father a child."

"Get this, Carl. I'm as strong and as smart as I ever was, maybe stronger and smarter. Some people are going to learn that very soon. I've been given a second chance, haven't I, doctor?"

"You might call it that. What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm going to do better, doctor. Better than I did before. This time I'm not going to make any mistakes. And you, doctor, do you know what you're going to do?"

"No. Tell me what I'm going to do."

Weaver's eyes twisted to Pearce's face. "You think I'm just talking. Don't make that mistake. You're going to find out why."

"Why?"

"Why I've recovered like I have. Don't try to kid me. You've never seen anything like it. I'm not seventy years old any more. My body isn't. My mind isn't. Why?"

"What's your guess?"

"I never guess. I know. I get the facts from those who have them, and then I decide. That's what I want from you—the facts. I've been rejuvenated."

"You've been talking to Easter."

"Of course."

"But you never got that language from him. He'd never commit himself to that."

Weaver lowered at Pearce from under dark eyebrows, "What was done to me?"

"What does it matter? If you've been rejuvenated, that should be enough for any man."

"When Mr. Weaver asks a question," Jansen thrust in icily, "Mr. Weaver wants an answer."

Weaver brushed him aside. "Dr. Pearce doesn't frighten. But Dr. Pearce is a reasonable man. He believes in facts. He lives by logic. Understand me, doctor! I may be thirty now, but I will be seventy again. Before then I want to know how to be thirty again."

"Ah," Pearce sighed. "You're not talking about rejuvenation now. You're talking about immortality."

"Why not?"

"It's not for mortals. The human body wears out. Threescore years and ten. That—roughly—is what we're allotted. After that we start falling apart."

"I've had mine. Now I'm starting over at thirty. I've got forty to go. After that, what? Forty more?"

"We all die," Pearce said flatly. "Nothing can stop that. Not one man born has not come to the grave at last. There's a disease we contract at birth from which none of us recover; it's invariably fatal. Death."

"Suppose somebody develops a resistance to it!"

"Oh, I didn't mean that death was a specific disease," Pearce said quickly. "We die in many ways: accident, infection—" *And senescence,* Pearce thought. *For all we know, that's a disease. It* could *be a disease.* Etiology: *virus, unisolated, unsuspected, invades at birth or shortly thereafter—or maybe transmitted at conception.*

Incidence: *total.*

Symptoms: *slow degeneration of the physical entity, appearing shortly after maturity, increasing debility, failure of the circulatory system through arteriosclerosis and heart damage, malfunction of senses and organs, loss of cellular regenerative ability, susceptibility to secondary invasions—*

Prognosis: *One hundred per cent fatal.*

"Everything dies," Pearce went on smoothly. "Trees, planets, sun— It's natural, inevitable—" *But it isn't. Natural death is a relatively new thing. It appeared only when life became multicellular and complicated. Maybe it was the price for complexity, for the ability to think.*

Protozoa don't die. Metazoa — sponges, flatworms, coelenterates— don't die. Certain fish don't die, except through accident. "Voles are animals that never stop growing and never grow old." Where did I read that? And even the tissues of the highest vertebrates are immortal under the right conditions.

Carrel and Ebeling proved that. Give the cell enough of the right food, and it will never die. Cells from every part of the body have been kept alive indefinitely in vitro.

Differentiation and specialization —that meant that any individual cell

didn't find the perfect conditions. Besides staying alive, it had duties to perform for the whole. A plausible explanation, but was it true? Wasn't it just as plausible that the cell died because the circulatory system broke down?

Let the circulatory system remain sound, regenerative, and efficient, and the rest of the body might well remain immortal.

"Nothing's natural," Weaver said. "You gave me a transfusion. Immunities can be transferred with the blood, Easter told me. Who donated that pint of blood?"

Pearce sighed. "Someone named Marshall Cartwright."

The blood bank was in the oldest part of the building. Pearce led the way down the hot, narrow corridors, as far south on the east wing's second floor as possible, down a wandering stairway, to the square, cluttered little room.

"If you're smart," Jansen told him on the stairs, "you'll coöperate with Mr. Weaver. Do what he asks you. Tell him what he wants to know. You'll get taken care of. If not—?" Jansen smiled unpleasantly.

Pearce laughed uneasily. "What can Weaver do to me?"

"Don't find out," Jansen advised.

The technician accepted the job without comment. She flipped the pages of a ledger, searching. "Weaver?" she said. "Oh, here it is. The fourth." Her finger traveled across the sheet. "O neg. Hasn't been replaced, by the way."

Pearce turned on Jansen. "I thought you were going to take care of that."

"You'll get your blood tomorrow," the secretary growled. "Who was the donor?"

"Marshall Cartwright," said the technician. "O neg. Kline: O. K. Replaced— Now I remember. That was the day after our television appeal. We ran low on O neg, and our professional donor list was exhausted. Got a big response."

"Remember him?" asked Jansen.

She frowned and turned her head away to stare out the window. "That was the third. We have more than twenty donors a day. And that was over a week ago."

"Think!" Jansen demanded.

"I'm thinking," she flared. "What do you want to know?"

"What he looked like. What he said. His address."

"Was there something wrong with the blood?"

Pearce grinned suddenly. " 'Contrariwise,' said Tweedledee."

A brief smile slipped across the technician's face. "We don't get many complaints like that. I can give you his address easy enough." She riffled through a box of four-by-five index cards. "Funny. He sold his blood once but he didn't want to do it again." She walked across to the table against the east wall and opened a black, three-ring binder. She leafed through it.

"This is our registration and release form. Let's see, the third. Bean. Parker. Cartwright. Marshall

Cartwright. Abbot Hotel. No phone listed."

"Abbot," Jansen said thoughtfully. "Sounds like a flop joint. Does that bring anything back?" he asked the technician insistently. "He didn't want his name on the donor's list."

Slowly, regretfully, she shook her head. "What's all this about anyway? Weaver? Isn't that the old boy up in 305 who made such a miraculous recovery?"

"Right," Jansen said, brushing the question away. "We'll want photostats of the two entries. Shall we take the books along now—?"

"We'll see that you get them," Pearce cut in.

"Today," Jansen said.

"Today," Pearce agreed.

"That's all, then," Jansen said. "If you remember anything, get in touch with Mr. Weaver or me, Carl Jansen. You know how to reach us. There'll be something in it for you."

Something in it, something in it, Pearce thought. *The slogan of a class.* "What's in it for the human race? Never mind. You've got what you came for."

"I always do," Jansen said intently. "Mr. Weaver and me—we always get what we come for. Remember that!"

Pearce remembered while the young-old man named Leroy Weaver grew a handsome set of teeth, as white as his hair was black, and directed the course of his commercial empire from the hospital room, chafed at Pearce's delay in giving him the answer to his question, at the continual demands for blood samples, at his own enforced idleness, and slyly pinched the nurses.

Before the week was over, Weaver had forced through his discharge from the hospital and Pearce had located a private detective.

The black paint on the frosted glass of the door said:

JASON LOCKE
Confidential Investigations

But Locke wasn't Pearce's preconception of a private eye. He wasn't tough —not on the outside. The hardness was inside, and he didn't let it show.

Locke was middle-aged, graying, his face firm and tanned, a big man dressed in a well-draped tropical suit in light cocoa; he looked like a successful executive. Business wasn't that good. The office was shabby, deteriorating, the furniture was little better, and there was no secretary or receptionist.

He was just the man Pearce wanted.

He listened to Pearce and watched him with dark, steady eyes.

"I want you to find a man," Pearce said. "Marshall Cartwright. Last address: Abbot Hotel."

"Why?"

"What difference does it make?"

"I have a license to keep—and a desire to keep out of jail."

"There's nothing illegal about it," Pearce said quickly, "but there might be danger. I won't lie to you; it's a medical problem I can't explain. It's important to me that you find Cartwright. It's important to him — it might even be important to the

world. The danger lies in the fact that other people are looking for him; if they spot you they might get rough. I want you to find Cartwright before they do."

"Who is 'they?' "

Pearce shrugged helplessly. "Pinkerton, Burns, International—I don't know. One of the big firms, probably."

"Is that why you didn't go to them?"

"One reason. I won't conceal anything, though. The man hiring them is Leroy Weaver."

Locke looked interested. "I heard the old boy was back on the prowl. Have you got any pictures, descriptions, anything to help me spot him?"

Pearce looked down at his hands. "Nothing except the name. He's a young man. He sold a pint of his blood on the third. He refused to have his name added to our professional donor's list. He gave his address then as the Abbot."

"I know it," Locke said. "A flytrap on Ninth. That means he's left town, I'd say."

"Why do you say that?"

"That's why he sold the blood. To get out of town. He wasn't interested in selling it again; he wasn't going to be around. And anyone who would stay at a place like the Abbot wouldn't toss away a chance at some regular, effortless money."

"That's what I figured," Pearce said, nodding slowly. "Will you take the job?"

Locke swung around in his swivel chair and stared out the window across the light standards, transformers, and streetcar lines of Twelfth Street. It was nothing to look at, but he seemed to draw decision from it. "Fifty dollars a day and expenses," he said, swinging back. "Sixty if I have to go out of town."

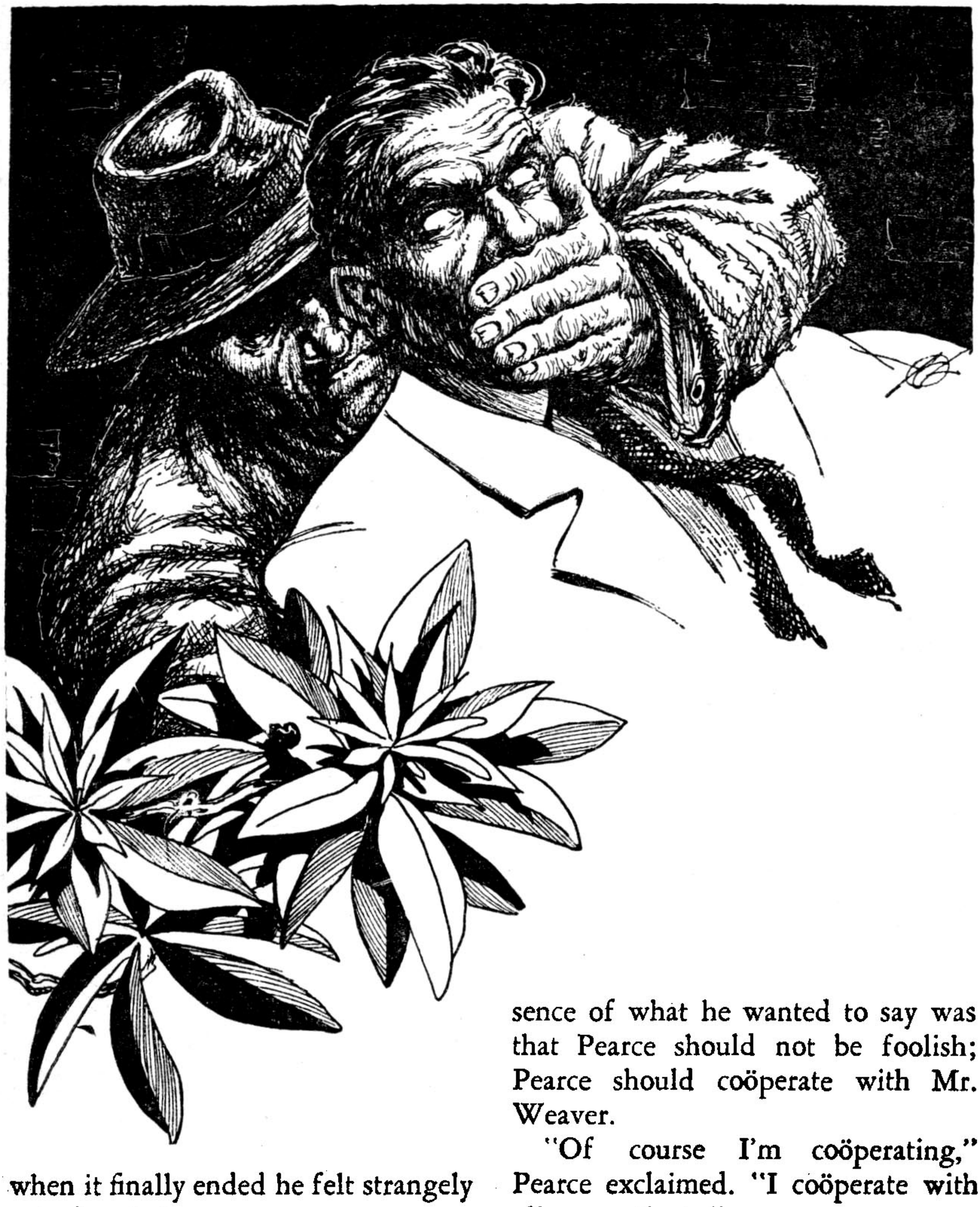
It was that afternoon Pearce discovered that he was being followed.

He walked along the warm, autumn streets, and the careless crowds, the hurrying, anonymous shoppers, passed on either side without a glance and came behind, and conviction walked with him. He moved through the air-conditioned stores, quickly or dawdling over a display of deodorants at a counter, glancing surreptitiously behind, seeing nothing but sure that someone was watching.

The symptoms were familiar. They were mainly those of hysterical women, most often in that wistful, tormented period of middle age, but occasionally in adolescence or early womanhood. Pearce had never expected to share them: the sensitivity in the back of the neck and between the shoulder blades that made him want to shrug it away, the leg-tightening desire to hurry, to run, to dodge in a doorway, into an elevator—

Pearce nodded to himself and lingered. When he went to his car, he went slowly, talked to the parking lot attendant for a moment before he drove away, and drove straight home.

He never did identify the man or men who shadowed him, then or later. It kept up for weeks, so that



when it finally ended he felt strangely naked and alone.

When he got to his apartment, the telephone was ringing. That was not surprising. A doctor's phone rings a hundred times as often as that of an ordinary citizen.

Dr. Easter was the caller. The essence of what he wanted to say was that Pearce should not be foolish; Pearce should coöperate with Mr. Weaver.

"Of course I'm coöperating," Pearce exclaimed. "I coöperate with all my patients."

"That isn't what I meant," Dr. Easter said in a voice as unctuous as molasses. "Work with him, not against him. You'll find it's worth your while."

"It's worth my while to practice

medicine the best way I can," Pearce said evenly. "Beyond that no one has a call on me, and no one ever will."

"Very fine sentiments," Dr. Easter agreed pleasantly. "The question is: Will Mr. Weaver think you are practicing medicine properly? That's something to consider."

Pearce lowered the phone gently into the cradle, thinking about how it was practicing medicine, being a doctor—and he knew he could never be happy at anything else. He turned over in his mind the subtle threat Easter had made; it could be done. The specter of malpractice was never far away, and a powerful alliance of money and respectability could come close to lifting a license.

He considered Easter, and he knew that it was better to risk the title than to give away the reality.

The next week was a time of wondering and waiting, of keeping busy, a problem a doctor seldom faces. It was a time of uneventful routine.

Then it seemed as if everything happened at once.

As he walked from his car toward the front door of the apartment house, a hand reached out of the shadows beside an ornamental fir and pulled him into the darkness.

Before he could say anything or struggle, a hand was clamped tight over his mouth, and a voice whispered in his ear, "Quiet now! This is Locke. The private eye, remember?"

Pearce nodded stiffly. Slowly the hand relaxed. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, Pearce made out Locke's features. His face was heavily, darkly bearded, and something had happened to the nose. Locke had been in a brawl; the nose was broken, and the face was cut and bruised.

"Never mind me," Locke said huskily. "You should see the other guys."

As Pearce drew back a little, he could see that Locke was dressed in old clothes looking like hand-me-downs from the Salvation Army. "Sorry I got you into it," he said.

"Part of the job. Listen. I haven't got long, and I want to give you my report."

"It can wait. Come on up. Let me take a look at that face. You can send me a written re—"

"Nothing doing," Locke said heavily. "I'm not signing my name to anything. Too dangerous. From now on I'm going to keep my nose clean. I did all right for a few days. Then they caught up with me. Well, they're sorry, too. You wanta hear it?"

Pearce nodded.

For a while Locke thought he might get somewhere. He had registered at the Abbot, got friendly with the room clerk, and finally asked about his friend, Cartwright, who had flopped there a couple of weeks earlier. The clerk was willing enough to talk. Trouble was, he didn't know much, and what little he knew he wouldn't have told to a stranger. Guests at the Abbot were liable to be persecuted by police and collection agents, and the clerk had suspicions that every questioner was from the Health Board.

Cartwright had paid his bill and left suddenly, no forwarding address given. They hadn't heard from him since, but people had been asking about him. "In trouble, eh?" the clerk asked wisely. Locke nodded gravely.

The clerk leaned closer. "I had a hunch, though, that Cartwright was heading for Des Moines. Something he said . . . don't remember what now."

Locke took off for Des Moines with a sample of Cartwright's handwriting from the Abbot register. He had canvassed the Des Moines hotels, rooming houses, motels. Finally, at a first-class hotel, he noticed the name "Marshall Carter."

Cartwright had left the Abbot on the ninth. Carter had checked into the Des Moines hotel on the tenth. The handwritings looked identical.

Locke caught up with Carter in East St. Louis. He turned out to be a middle-aged salesman of photographic equipment who hadn't been near Kansas City in a year.

End of the trail.

"Can anyone else find him?" Pearce asked.

"Not if he don't want to be found," Locke said shrewdly. "A nationwide search—an advertising campaign — they'd help. But if he's changed his name and doesn't go signing his new one to a lot of things that might fall into an agency's hands, nobody is going to find him. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

Pearce looked at him steadily, not saying anything.

"He's got no record," Locke went on. "That helps. Got a name check on him from the bigger police departments and the F. B. I. No go. No record, no fingerprints. Not under that name."

"How'd you get hurt?" Pearce asked, after a moment.

"They were waiting for me outside my office when I got back. Two of 'em. Good, too. But not good enough. 'Lay off!' they said. O. K. I'm not stupid. I'm laying off, but I wanted to finish the job first."

Pearce nodded slowly. "I'm satisfied. Send me a bill."

"Bill nothing!" Locke growled. "Five hundred is the price. Put it in an envelope and mail it to my office—no checks. I should charge you more for using me as a stakeout, but maybe you had your reasons. Watch your step, Doc!"

He was gone then, slipping away through the shadows so quickly and silently that Pearce started to speak before he realize that the detective was not beside him. Pearce started after him for a moment, shrugged, and opened the front door.

Going up in the elevator, he was thoughtful. In front of his apartment door, he fumbled the key out absently, inserted it in the lock, and took the key out to check on it when the key wouldn't turn. He noticed then that the door was half-an-inch ajar.

Pearce gave the door a little push. It swung inward noiselessly. The light from the hall streamed over his shoulder, but it only lapped a little way into the dark room. He peered

into it for a moment, hunching his shoulders as if that might help.

"Come in, Dr. Pearce," someone said softly.

The lights went on.

Pearce blinked once. "Good evening, Mr. Weaver. And you, Jansen. How are you?"

"Fine, doctor," Weaver said. "Just fine."

He didn't look fine, Pearce thought. He looked older, haggard, tired. Was he worried? Weaver was sitting in his favorite chair, a green leather one beside the fireplace. Jansen was standing beside the wall switch. "You've made yourself right at home, I see."

Weaver chuckled. "We told the manager we were friends of yours, and, of course, he didn't doubt us. But then we are, aren't we?"

Pearce looked at Weaver and then at Jansen. "I wonder. Do you have any friends—or only hirelings." He turned his eyes back to Weaver. "You don't look well. I'd like you to come back to the hospital for a check-up—"

"I'm feeling fine, I said." Weaver's voice was lifted a little before it dropped back to a conversational tone. "We wanted to have a little talk—about coöperation."

Pearce looked at Jansen. "Funny. I don't feel very talkative. I've had a hard day."

Weaver's eyes didn't leave Pearce's face. "Get out, Carl," he said gently.

"But Mr. Weaver—" Jansen began, his gray eyes darkening.

"Get out, Carl," Weaver repeated. "Wait for me in the car."

After Carl was gone, Pearce sank down in the armchair facing Weaver. He let his gaze drift around the room, lingering on the polished darkness of the hi-fi record player and the slightly lighter wood of the desk in the corner. "Did you find anything?" he asked.

"Not what we were looking for," Weaver replied calmly.

"What was that?"

"Cartwright's location."

"What makes you think I'd know anything about that?"

Weaver clasped his hands lightly in his lap. "Can't we work together?"

"Certainly. What would you like to know—about your health?"

"What did you do with those samples of blood you took from me? You must have taken back that pint I got."

"Almost. Part of it we separated. Got the plasma. Separated the gamma globulin from it with zinc. Used it on various animals."

"And what did you find out?"

"The immunity is in the gamma globulin. It would be, of course. That's the immunity factor. You should see my old rat. As frisky as the youngest rat in the lab and twice as healthy."

"So it's part of me, too?" Weaver asked.

Pearce shook his head slowly. "That's just the original globulins diluted in your blood."

"Then to live forever I would have to have periodic transfusions?"

"If it's possible to live forever," Pearce said, shrugging.

"It is. You know that. There's at least one person who's going to live forever. Cartwright. Unless something happens to him. That would be a tragedy, wouldn't it? In spite of all precautions, accidents happen. People get murdered. Can you imagine some careless kid spilling that golden blood into a filthy gutter? Some jealous woman putting a knife in that priceless body?"

"What do you want, Weaver?" Pearce asked evenly. "You've got your reprieve from death. What more can you ask?"

"Another. And another. Without end. Why should some nobody get it by accident? What good will it do him? Or the world? He needs to be protected—and used. Properly handled he could be worth . . . well, whatever men will pay for life. I'd pay a million a year—more if I had to. Other men would pay the same. We'd save the best men in the world, those who have demonstrated their ability by becoming wealthy. Oh, yes. Scientists, too—we'd select some of those. People who haven't gone into business—leaders, statesmen."

"What about Cartwright?"

"What about him?" Weaver blinked as if recalled from a lovely dream. "Do you think anyone who ever lived would have a better life, would be better protected, more pampered? Why, he wouldn't have to ask for a thing. No one would dare say 'no,' to him for fear he might kill himself. He'd be the hen that laid the golden eggs."

"He'd have everything but freedom."

"A much overrated commodity."

"The one immortal man in the world."

"That's just it," Weaver said, leaning forward. "Instead of only one, there would be many."

Pearce shook his head from side to side as if he had not heard. "A chance meeting of genes—a slight alteration by cosmic ray or something even more subtle and accidental—and immortality is created. Some immunity to death — some means of keeping the circulatory system young, resistant, rejuvenated. 'Man is as old as his arteries,' Cazali said. Take care of your arteries, and they will keep your cells immortal."

"Tell me, man! Tell me where Cartwright is before all that is lost forever." Weaver leaned forward urgently.

"A man who knows he's got a million years to live is going to be pretty darned careful," Pearce said.

"That's just it," Weaver said, his eyes narrowing. "He doesn't know. If he'd known, he'd never have given his blood." His face changed subtly. "Or does he know—now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you tell him?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't you? Don't you remember going to the Abbot Hotel on the evening of the ninth, of asking for Cartwright, of talking to him? You

should. The clerk identified your picture. And that night Cartwright left."

Pearce remembered the Abbot Hotel all right, the narrow, dark lobby, ancient, grimy, fly-specked. He had thought of cholera and bubonic plague as he crossed it. He remembered Cartwright, too—that fabulous creature, looking seedy and quite ordinary, who had listened, though, and believed and taken the money and gone.

"I don't believe it," Pearce said.

"I should have known right away," Weaver said, as if to himself. "You knew his name that first day. When I asked for it."

"Presuming I did. If I did all that you say. Do you think it was easy for me? To you he's money. What do you think he was to me? That fantastic laboratory, walking around! What wouldn't I have given to study him! To find out how his body worked, to try to synthesize the substance. You have your drives, Weaver, but I have mine."

"Why not combine them, Pearce?"

"They wouldn't mix."

"Don't get so holy, Pearce. Life isn't holy."

"Life is what we make it," Pearce said softly. "I won't have a hand in what you're planning."

Weaver got up quickly from his chair and took a step toward Pearce. "Some of you professional men get delusions of ethics," he said in a kind of muted snarl. "Not many. A few There's nothing sacred about what you do. You're just craftsmen, mechanics—you do a job—you get paid for it. There's no reason to get religious about it."

"Don't be absurd, Weaver. If you don't feel religious about what you do, you shouldn't be doing it. You feel religious about making money. Money's sacred to you. Well, life is sacred to me. That's what I deal in, all day long, every day. Death is an old enemy. I'll fight him until the end."

Pearce propelled himself out of his chair. He stood close to Weaver, staring fiercely into the man's blue eyes. "Understand this, Weaver. What you're planning is impossible. What if we all could be rejuvenated? Do you have the slightest idea what would happen? Have you considered what it might do to civilization?

"No, I can see you haven't. Well it would bring your society tumbling down around your pillars of gold. Civilization would shake itself to pieces like an unbalanced flywheel. Our culture is constructed on the assumption that we spend two decades growing and learning, a few more producing wealth and progeny, and a final decade or two decaying before we die.

"Look back! See what research and medicine have done in the past century. They've added a few years—just a few—to the average lifespan, and our society is groaning at the readjustment. Think what forty years would do! Think what would happen if we never died!

"There's only one way something like this can be absorbed into the race

—gradually, so that society can adjust, unknowing, to this new thing inside it. All Cartwright's children will inherit the mutation. They must. It must be dominant. And they will survive, because this has the greatest survival factor ever created."

"Where is he?" Weaver asked.

"It won't work, Weaver," Pearce said, his voice rising. "I'll tell you why it won't work. Because you would kill him. You think you wouldn't, but you'd kill him as certainly as you're a member of the human race. You'd bleed him to death, or you'd kill him just because you couldn't stand having something immortal around. You or some other warped specimen of humanity. You'd kill him, or he'd get killed in the riots of those who were denied life, tossed to the wolves of death. What people can't have they destroy. That's been proved over and over."

"Where is he?" Weaver repeated.

"It won't work for a final reason." Pearce's voice dropped as if it had found a note of pity. "But I won't tell you that. I'll let you find out for yourself."

"Where is he?" Weaver insisted softly.

"I don't know. You won't believe that. But I don't know. I didn't want to know. I told him the truth about himself, and I gave him some money, and I told him to leave town, to change his name, hide, anything, but not be found, to be fertile, to populate the Earth—"

"I don't believe you. You've got him hidden away for yourself. You wouldn't give him a thousand dollars for nothing."

"You know the amount?" Pearce said queerly.

Weaver's lip curled. "I know every deposit you've made in the last five years, and every withdrawal. You're small, Pearce, and you're cheap, and I'm going to break you."

Pearce smiled, unworried. "No, you're not. You don't dare use violence, because I just might know where Cartwright is hiding. Then you'd lose everything. And you won't try anything else because if you do I'll release the article I've written about Cartwright—I'll send you a copy—and then the fat would really be in the fire. If everybody knew about Cartwright, you wouldn't have a chance to control it, even if you could find him."

At the door, Weaver turned and said, calmly, "I'll be seeing you again."

"That's right," Pearce agreed and thought, *I've been no help to you, because you won't ever believe that I haven't got a string tied to Cartwright.*

But you're not the one I pity.

Two days after that came the news of Weaver's marriage, an elopement with a twenty-five-year-old girl from the Country Club district, a Patricia Warren. It was the week-end sensation—wealth and beauty, age and youth.

Pearce studied the girl's picture in the Sunday paper and told himself that surely she had got what she

wanted. And Weaver—Pearce knew him well enough to know that he had got what he wanted.

The fourth week since the transfusion passed uneventfully, and the fifth week was only distinguished by a summons from Jansen, which Pearce ignored. The beginning of the sixth week delivered a frantic call from Dr. Easter. Pearce refused to go to Weaver's newly purchased mansion.

They brought him to the hospital in a screaming ambulance, clearing the streets ahead of it with its siren and its flashing red light, dodging through the traffic with its precious cargo: money, personified.

Pearce stood beside the hard, hospital bed, checking the pulse in the bony wrist, and stared down at the emaciated body. It made no impression in the bed. In the silence, the harsh unevenness of the old man's breathing was loud. The only movement was the spasmodic rise and fall of the sheet that covered the old body.

He was living—barely. He had used up his allotted threescore years and ten. It wasn't merely that he was dying. We all are. With him it was imminent.

The pulse was feeble. The gift of youth had been taken away. Within the space of a few days, Weaver had been drained of color, drained of forty years of life.

He was an old man, dying. His face was yellowish over grayish blue, the color of death. It was bony, the wrinkled skin pulled back like a mask for the skull. Once he might have been handsome. Now his eyes were sunken, the closed eyelids dark over them, and his nose was a thin, arching beak.

This time, Pearce thought distantly, there will be no reprieve.

"I don't understand," Dr. Easter muttered. "I thought he'd been given forty years—"

"That was his conclusion," Pearce said. "It was more like forty days. Thirty to forty—that's how long the gamma globulin remains in the bloodstream. It was only a passive immunity. The only person with any lasting immunity to death is Cartwright, and the only ones he can give it to are his children and their children."

Easter looked around to see if the nurse was listening and whispered, "Couldn't we handle this better? Chance needs a little help sometimes. With semen banks and artificial insemination we could change the make-up of the human race in a couple of generations—"

"If we weren't all wiped out first," Pearce said and turned away coldly.

He waited, his eyes closed, listening to the harshness of Weaver's breathing, thinking of the tragedy of life and death—the being born and the dying, entwined, entangled, all one, and here was Weaver who had run out of life, and there was his child who would not be born for months yet. It was a continuity—a balance—a life for a life, and it had kept humanity stable for millions of years.

And yet — immortality? What might it mean?

He thought of Cartwright, the immortal, the hunted man—and while men remembered they would never let him rest, and if he got tired of hiding and running, he was doomed. The search would go on and on—crippled a little, fortunately, now that Weaver had dropped away — and Cartwright, with his burden, would never be able to live like other men.

He thought of him, trying to adjust to immortality in the midst of death, and he thought that immortality—the greatest gift, surely, that a man could receive—demanded payment in kind, like everything else. For immortality you must surrender the right to live.

God pity you, Cartwright.

"Transfusion, Dr. Pearce?" the nurse repeated.

"Oh, yes," he said hastily. "Might as well." He looked down at Weaver once more. "Send down a requisition. We know his type already—O negative."

THE END

THE ANALYTICAL LABORATORY

Because we had six stories in the July, 1955 issue, the scoring ranged from 1 to 6, and the point scores on the stories, therefore, tend somewhat higher.

Poul Anderson lost out on first place for the last installment of "Long Way Home," because Ace Books brought out the pocket book version of the story, under a different title, before our July issue hit the stands. A good many highly annoyed readers wrote in, mad at Astounding, mad at Anderson, and mad at practically everybody except Ace, who were responsible for the slip-up in violation of our contract on the story. The previous installments of "Long Way Home" had each been awarded the 1¢ a word bonus by your votes.

The score this time stands:

PLACE	STORY	AUTHOR	POINTS
1.	The Waitabits	Eric Frank Russell	2.64
2.	The Long Way Home (Conc.)	Poul Anderson	3.10
3.	In Clouds of Glory	Algis Budrys	3.46
4.	Tieline	Duncan H. Munro	3.85
5.	Rat Race	Frank Herbert	3.92

THE EDITOR.

DESIGN FLAW

Because our culture cannot acknowledge the reality of subjective phenomena such as hypnosis and hallucination, there is a new, deadly menace growing on the finest highways Man has ever built. Highway Hypnosis — officially masquerading as "sleep"—menaces every individual who uses the superhighways.

Some months ago, in the February 1955 issue of Astounding, Lee Correy had a story titled "Design Flaw." The essential plot presented the proposition that so long as a test-pilot's crack-up was labeled "human failure" or "pilot error," the source of that error could not be sought, and the cause eliminated. In the story, the source proved to be a flickering light that acted as an hypnotic device, knocking out the pilot by the neuro-physical effects it produced.

That fictional piece is almost perfectly parallel to a very real problem that is killing automobile drivers on the most perfect highways Mankind has ever built. There is an almost perfect analogue between the hypnotic device in the rocket planes Correy discussed, and the real highways that engineers are building. And—as Correy suggested—there is a cultural design flaw; if human beings are killed by something you don't understand—blame the human being.

"Highway hypnosis" it's called; the State Police of every state that operates the turnpike-thruway type highways have encountered the results—but have not adequately publicized the facts.

In our culture today, a man who admits to having hallucinations—seeing things, and hearing voices that aren't there—is automatically suspected of being either insane, a crackpot mystic, or a victim of D.T.'s. There are two "excuses" for having hallucinations that are acceptable; that he was "asleep and dreaming" or that he was delirious with fever or other metabolic upset.

The fact that any person who is in an hypnotic trance is, characteristically, susceptible to hallucinations, is not accepted culturally, because hypnosis itself is denied generally. Mention hypnosis to the average American citizen, and he is apt to reply with "Do you believe in hypnosis?" as he might ask if you believed in ghosts, or werewolves. The ordinary American has encountered hypnosis largely on the stage, where it is used as a supplement to presti-

digitation, acrobatic tricks, and conscious hoaxes-for-amusement. The reality of hypnosis is, thereby, greatly shadowed.

The modern psychologists, moreover, know as much about hypnosis as a dog does about the enzyme chemistry of digestion; both present the instance of being able to use the factors effectively, without any real understanding of what they are using, or how. There are certain well-known rituals by which a human being can be hypnotized; no real understanding of why it works, how it works, or what its possibilities and limitations are, exists.

Can a man be hypnotized into killing himself? No agreement on that question will be found among psychologists and professional hypnotists. Most professional psychologists deny that that is possible.

They are wrong; it can be done, and is done quite frequently—and done mechanically, without intervention of a human hypnotist.

It *may* be true that a positively opposed will cannot be overcome by a hypnotist—but an unwary individual can, most certainly, be destroyed by hypnosis. The following article is as careful an analysis as possible of a specific case in which the data available indicates that hypnosis, mechanically induced, was the cause of death.

The simple objective-observation data is as follows:

On June 17, 1955, Joseph H. Kearney, age 21, driving a 1950 Plymouth sedan westward on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, at about noon of a bright, clear day, drove his car directly into the rear of a huge trailer-truck loaded with slag. The standard truck-bed height is determined by the standard freight-loading platform height—which, in turn, matches railroad boxcar heights. The height is such that the truck bed will clear the massive engine of a passenger car, and come in, almost unopposed, through the windshield of a passenger car. In such accidents the driver of the passenger car is struck directly in the face, and either killed instantly by crushing the frontal bones of the skull, or dies in a matter of minutes. Joe Kearney died in about ten minutes.

His accident was typical of a particular class of Turnpike accidents; in good visibility conditions, the driver crashes his car directly into the back of a huge truck moving in the same direction at a somewhat slower speed. Since passenger car speeds on the Turnpike are about fifteen miles an hour higher than truck speeds, the energy of impact is not very great—but is usually expended in the most efficiently deadly manner possible—in crushing the very light superstructure of the car, and the heads of the passengers.

Typically, the police find no skid marks; the driver does not appear to have made any effort whatever to save himself.

In the case of Joe Kearney, the injuries sustained were unimportant bruises and scrapes—except for the

crushed skull, and a broken left arm. Had he so much as ducked sidewise into the empty passenger's seat beside him, he would have been almost unhurt. Apparently, the only defensive effort he made was an attempt to snatch his left hand from the wheel, and shield his face; he seems to have been unaware of any danger whatever until it was far too late to do anything else.

This total unawareness of danger is the characteristic of the accident-type. Another characteristic is, of course, that the drivers do not have an opportunity to explain what happened, even if they live briefly afterward. It's the frontal lobes of the brain that are immediately affected.

The standard police explanation is that the driver "dozed at the wheel." I intend to show that this explanation is not only inadequate and fallacious—but is an essential part of the mechanism that causes further such accidents; that *this explanation is itself part of the cause.*

First: the car did not fail him. It had been carefully checked just before he started the trip.

Second: he was himself in perfect physical condition. The preceding day, he had had a complete and careful physical examination, not because he felt sick, but because of the sudden, and unexpected discovery that a friend had far-advanced leukemia. In view of that unexpected discovery, Joe Kearney had a careful and thorough check; he was in perfect health.

That the accident was not due to an unpredictable, undiagnosable heart failure was further proven by the fact that, after the accident, a passing doctor stopped to render what aid he might. There is a small monastery on the hill immediately above where the accident occurred, and some of the monks came down to offer what help they could. At that time, hemorrhage had not reached the brain-centers controlling heart and lung function; he definitely had not died before the accident.

Driving directly into a highly visible truck, on a bright June day, near noon, cannot be explained by "sun in his eyes"; at noon, in June, the sun is overhead.

It might be explained in terms of sheer, abysmal stupidity. But not in this case; five days previously, Joe Kearney graduated from Williams College, *cum laude,* with Phi Beta Kappa. He was not stupid.

Nor can it be explained in terms of inattentiveness in any normal sense; he would not have established such a scholastic record if he was given to vague and wandering attention to a task at hand.

It might be put down to the explanation of "an irresponsible kid"; this explanation does not hold in the case in hand, nor in several other cases which can be cited. Joe Kearney had been editor of the Williams *Record,* and manager of the Williams football team. Neither job is given to an individual characterized by irresponsibility.

The usual explanation—and the

official police explanation in this case —is "overfatigue and dozing at the wheel." Joe Kearney had gone to bed the night before at about 10:30, and started at about 6:30 that morning. He was not, by noon that day, overtired.

He had had no alcoholic drinks in the previous three days. He was not drunk.

The previous night, while packing the car for his trip, he had specifically mentioned the danger of sleepiness on long trips, and specifically stated his considered plans for combating that danger.

Emotional tensions and disturbances can, and do, cause highway accidents. When Joe Kearney left in the morning, he was happy and cheerful; he was not angry or tense. Neither was he morose or despondent; he was going to visit his fiancée, and take some summer courses he wanted. He had a Ford Foundation scholarship for Harvard, to work in sociology, this fall.

If the highways can kill a young, healthy, intelligent, thoroughly sane, and responsible man, in a good car in good condition—one, who is consciously and intelligently aware of the publicized dangers of the road, and who was an experienced long-distance driver—then the roads are being designed with an insane optimism as to the type of drivers that will use them. Some danger that has *not* been recognized and discussed must be present.

One week after Joe Kearney's accident, the news reports brought news of a precisely similar accident that killed a family of five. A New York Department of Welfare psychologist, Abraham Kowalsky, on his way to Ohio to visit relatives, with his brother, sister-in-law, and two small children, drove into the rear of a huge oil truck-trailer combination. It is improbable that a man selected by a great city as a competent Welfare Department psychologist, could be classified as irresponsible, nor is it probable that such a man would be indifferent to, or unaware of, the dangers of sleep on a long drive.

Again, the accident shows the characteristic pattern; in good visibility, on a clear road, an intelligent, competent driver drove his car straight into the rear of a huge and highly visible truck, bringing almost immediate death, with no apparent effort to avoid the crash and destruction.

None of the conventional explanations of highway accidents can be fitted to the pattern of these accidents. But the explanation of true, full, deep-trance hypnosis fits them perfectly.

Any professional psychologist or professional hypnotist can verify these facts: A human being capable of concentrating his attention on a task, is susceptible to hypnosis. Morons, and small children, the feeble-minded, or those otherwise incapable of sustained span of attention, have an inherent immunity to hypnosis. Other individuals may have, for one reason or another, an acquired immunity—

but like any acquired immunity, it is not an unlimited immunity.

The greater the ability of an individual to focus his attention on a task in hand, the greater the depth of hypnotic trance that can be produced. The scatterbrained, skitter-minded and weak-willed individual can be hypnotized, but only slightly. It takes a mind capable of powerfully focused, and highly concentrated attention to achieve the extreme single-mindedness of deep trance.

If you're a weak-minded, scatterbrained, inattentive, or moronic individual, you're reasonably safe from hypnosis, whether induced by an expert or by a mechanical device. Otherwise, your ability to concentrate on a task at hand can be used as a trap to catch you. Only the really strong-minded can be taken into extremely deep hypnosis—deep enough to kill themselves.

The individual who can be deeply hypnotized can, in the control of an expert hypnotist, be induced to see visions, hear voices, have hallucinations of all sorts—tactile, auditory, visual, olfactory, and even hallucinations of the deep body senses, such as the feeling of having just eaten a good meal.

These are positive hallucinations —the beliefs that something that is *not* present is being experienced.

Equally, the deep-trance hypnotic subject can be induced to have *negative* hallucinations—to *not*-see something that *is* present, for example. A standard demonstration has the subject commanded to be unaware of the presence of one of the individuals present in a group. The occluded individual can stand immediately in front of the subject, talk to him, wave his arms at him, yell at him—and the subject is entirely unaware of his presence. The hypnotic subject will attempt to walk right through the occluded person, in the full conviction that the individual isn't there. The hypnotized subject will "see," by positive hallucination, the walls, chairs, or other objects on the other side of the occluded person, while *not* seeing the occluded individual.

The professional hypnotist can describe the conditions that help hypnosis; centuries of trial and error have worked out highly effective techniques. Although no fundamental understanding of what hypnosis is, or how it works, exists—a dog can digest food with great efficiency, without knowing how or why. You can move your hand and arm, and yet you have no really fundamental undersatnding of how, or why. How is a wish translated into a mechanical movement? Explain this to a physicist, in full detail, and he will have all the knowledge necessary to build a thought-controlled relay. Until you can describe the steps necessary to produce a thought-controlled relay, you do not have a full, really fundamental, understanding of how you wiggle a finger.

The hypnotist, in trying to induce hypnotic trance in his subject, will seek to do two things: minimize dis-

tracting influences, and maximize attention on himself, or his mechanical hypnotic aid. The essence of hypnosis is the production of a state of monomania—a state wherein only *one* concept of importance or reality exists. The subject will be induced to relax, to set aside his worries, fears, distractions. He will be made as comfortable as possible, so that his body does not distract his attention. To minimize distractions caused by external sounds seeping in, a monotonous, mechanically produced sound of some kind may be used.

Simultaneously, more and more attention is focused on the hypnotist, or his hypnotic device—a flashing light, or a swinging pendulum, or a rotating Archimedes Spiral, for example. All external distractions are masked by some monotonous stimulus that the mind finds uninteresting, and soon ignores.

The modern pluperfect highway, the Turnpike and Thruway type, is, combined with the modern car, a very nearly perfect hypnotic device —with no hypnotist on hand to keep it under control.

The highways have been designed to minimize dangers; there are almost no visible dangers left. The entering traffic is brought in on access roads that feed the cars in already traveling at full traffic speed and direction. The broad, perfect pavement stretches out through peaceful countryside, basking in a June day, while mile after mile after mile slips monotonously behind. The highway swings slowly back and forth before your eyes, monotonously curving and recurving. The engine hums easily and steadily; the hills seem unreal, as the tremendous power of modern car engines sweeps you up them without effort. Power steering and automatic transmissions make driving comfortable and relaxed, and the fine design of the springs make the car rock gently and smoothly along, like a liner on a smooth sea. The landscape is the peaceful meadow and forest land that has always meant peace and relaxation to Man; it flees backward like a perfect, three-dimensional movie, an unreality that sweeps past on some screen, made more unreal by the slow movement of other cars, slowly overtaking or falling behind. The hours go by easily, smoothly, with the monotonous burble of air over the car body, and the steady *flick-flick-flick* of the tires on the expansion joints, the soft susurration of tires on smooth pavement and the shattering crash of the truck coming in the windshield.

Every essential e'ement of the most practiced hypnotist is present—except the hypnotist himself. The perfect design of the highway and the cars gives a sense of security—and an increasing sense of unreality of the external world. The attention is concentrated more and more totally on driving the highway—the highway—the highway—

This is not sleep; this is the glassy-eyed stare of deep-trance hypnosis. It is essentially, and drastically different from sleep. Ask any experi-

enced hypnotist or psychologist; sleep involves a dispersal and quieting of attention till there is no conscious or attentive thought. Hypnosis involves the exact reverse; a concentration of attention on a single subject or person.

A modern car, driving at seventy miles an hour, if completely released from control will leave the lane it is in within a matter of seconds. Stable as the modern machines are, they are not equipped with servo-devices to hold them in the highway lane. If a man goes to sleep at the wheel, and drops his hands from the wheel, the car will leave the roadway; it may run into a fixed obstacle to the right, or swerve into the opposite roadway and strike another car head-on. But it will *not* stay in its own lane, for many seconds, while it overtakes and crashes into a fast-moving truck ahead.

But that happens and kills.

To stay in its own lane for the many seconds required to overtake the truck ahead, it must be controlled. Sleep will not account for the type of accident Joe Kearney and Abraham Kowalsky had. Nor for the scores of other accidents following precisely that same, lethal pattern, on the thruways and turnpikes all over the country.

The police will have great difficulty getting true reports of the situation, because of the cultural orientations that prevent anyone saying, "I fell into an hypnotic trance, and had hallucinations." To do so, in our present cultural orientation, is considered equivalent to stating that you are mentally incompetent at best, and probably insane.

Under these conditions, the individual who does experience the effects, and lives to tell anything at all about it, will say "I fell asleep and dreamed that—"

Once it was recognized that a man who falls asleep will have his car off the highway in a matter of seconds, the reports can be reevaluated in terms of hypnotic hallucinations. Try asking your friends who've driven thruways, with this factor in mind. Remember, too, that the individual who has experienced these hypnotic hallucinations, if he has the standard cultural indoctrination, *cannot* acknowledge, even to himself, that he suffered hallucinations, until he understands what hypnosis is, and can do, sufficiently. Otherwise, if he admits, even to himself, "I had an hallucination," he is saying—acknowledging—to himself, "I am insane."

Most of the reports you get will, necessarily, concern *positive* hallucinations. The individual is not, by the very nature of the thing, aware of *negative* hallucinations. Also, since negative hallucinations are the necessary ingredient of the type of lethal accident Joe Kearney had, there are fewer individuals who had negative hallucinations around. Positive hallucinations will tend to make the driver shy away from obstacles that aren't there; negative hallucinations lead him to try to drive through obstacles that are there.

One friend of mine reported driving along the Pennsylvania Turnpike for some twenty miles, with a huge steel bridge superstructure surrounding the highway. It seemed quite normal at the time.

Another complained of the way the farmers along the Turnpike kept driving their wagons across the highway. At the time, it had seemed annoying, but normal.

A few have told me that they had negative hallucinations, and were snapped out of it just in time by the cry of a passenger in the car with them. It's naturally impossible for a passenger to know that the driver isn't seeing the staringly visible truck, painted in flaming crimson and yellow, bright in the sunlight, directly ahead, until the car is obviously in immediate danger of collision.

Since all in the car died with him, it's impossible to know whether any of Kowalsky's passengers ever knew that he did not see at all the huge tank-truck he drove into.

Highway hypnosis is not rare; it's quite standard, as far as my own personal investigations can determine. Something like sixty per cent of the people I've asked have reported experiencing it in one form or another.

The problem, quite obviously, is not one that affects only "the other guy"; it affects each of us most immediately and personally. All right —suppose you yourself *are* immune to hypnosis. You may have trouble with that other fellow who's dodging the farmer's wagons you can't see, or suddenly stopping for a couple of hitch-hiking sailors that only he can see.

There's a "Design Flaw" all right —but until the psychologists work out some answers, we can't eliminate this one as readily as the engineers in Correy's story did. Hypnosis has been a seriously neglected factor of the human mind; now it must be attacked as a major engineering problem. For once, we have an aspect of the mind that ties directly into a solid engineering job; it will require that psychology submit to that harshest of all disciplines—the absolutely inflexible, utterly autocratic, uncompromisingly dogmatic discipline of "Does it work?"

This will not be a question of "In the opinion of the most competent authorities—", but a matter of counting the corpses. It works when, and only when, they can produce something that stops the succession of faceless, or headless corpses. The problem can be specified very neatly: "How can hypnotic effects, including hallucinations, be stopped?" And the test of whether or not they have the right answer is just as easy; no more accidents of the specific type in question. Anything less than that means they have not solved the problems of hypnosis.

I am aware that the humanic sciences have long held that such absolutistic tests are not suitable for the far more complex and delicate problems of the humanics field.

Why not? Why is it unfair to demand of one field of human effort

a specific answer to a specific problem, when such demands are considered normal in all other fields of science?

Until studies *do* crack that problem, the automotive engineers only make the trouble more acute when they further perfect their already fine products. The highway engineers dare not further improve their accomplishments; their perfection already is a major component of highway hypnosis.

Until the psychologists have cracked their problem, some basic actions of a stop-gap nature are possible.

1. *Hypnosis involves concentration—almost total concentration of attention. Any factors which interfere with this total concentration will diminish the hypnotic effect. Therefore, distractions must be incorporated in highway design.*

Admittedly, this is a backward step; it's a blow-out patch, and, like any blow-out patch, is itself a possible source of trouble. We'll simply have to cuss the situation, cuss the remissness and ineffectiveness of psychological understanding, and do what we can.

One possible method of introducing distractions, is by allowing advertising billboards back on the highways; they are carefully designed to attract the attention of drivers, and are fairly effective distractants—yet are not too overpoweringly distracting. But they serve a very helpful function in introducing into the landscape an element that requires conscious attention for its analysis. Trees and meadowlands do not.

2. *The Garden State Parkway, in New Jersey, has placed its toll booths directly across the highway. They force all cars to stop every so often, and allow the toll booth attendants to get a look at the driver. A moment's conversation can, normally, break the mechanical hypnosis the highway induces.*

Naturally, the highway engineer's effort to achieve perfectly smooth traffic flow is partly defeated by these arbitrarily introduced traffic-dams. But they do serve as a blow-out patch device for interrupting highway hypnosis.

3. *Since worries and distractions tend to impede development of hypnotic concentration, causing the driver to worry about his own condition is a specific preventative for hypnosis.*

If signs along the highways are set up, and at every entranceway large warnings set up, reading "WARNING! H Y P N O S I S AHEAD!" or the like, while adequate publicity is given to this danger, drivers will be worried about hypnosis. That, in itself, will constitute some protection; it will be a distraction.

It's another blow-out patch, however; *too much* worry is, itself, hypnotic. The well-known fear-paralysis is simply one form of hypnosis.

Many other stop-gap devices can, no doubt, be worked out. New Jersey has tried putting in patches of road-

way that are so ribbed that, when tires go over them, they make a sharp, rather startling, whine. The New Jersey Turnpike has been deliberately curved, to reduce the monotony of an absolutely straight road. Unfortunately, that makes it pendulum back and forth in front of the driver's eyes, with less gain than was hoped for.

No real solution to the problem can be achieved until the basic mechanisms of the mind involved are elucidated. If psychology can't do it, perhaps information theory studies can take over the job and solve it on an entirely engineering basis. So far as Mankind is concerned, we do not care in the slightest who solves it—whether it's a psychologist, an information theory expert, or an African witch doctor; the sole consideration is that *it must be solved.*

Part of the difficulty is that, currently, because no one has solved it, it is a fright-inducing problem, and people avoid discussing it, or admitting it exists. They much prefer to say "he dozed at the wheel."

The difficulty is that *that explanation itself* kills people. Joe Kearney knew about sleep; he took it into his considerations, and acted against it, and, having done that, felt safer. The damnable part of it is that those measures which protect against the danger of sleep . . . *aid hypnosis.* Strong coffee, caffeine citrate pills, and benzedrine all tend to prevent sleep, by acting as cerebral stimulants, and allowing a higher concentration of attention.

The criminal isn't a victim of highway hypnosis; he's constantly distracted, wary, on the lookout for the police.

The speeder isn't apt to fall to hypnosis; he, too, is on the lookout for the police, and is tensed and excited by the problem of keeping his unstable, bouncing car on the road.

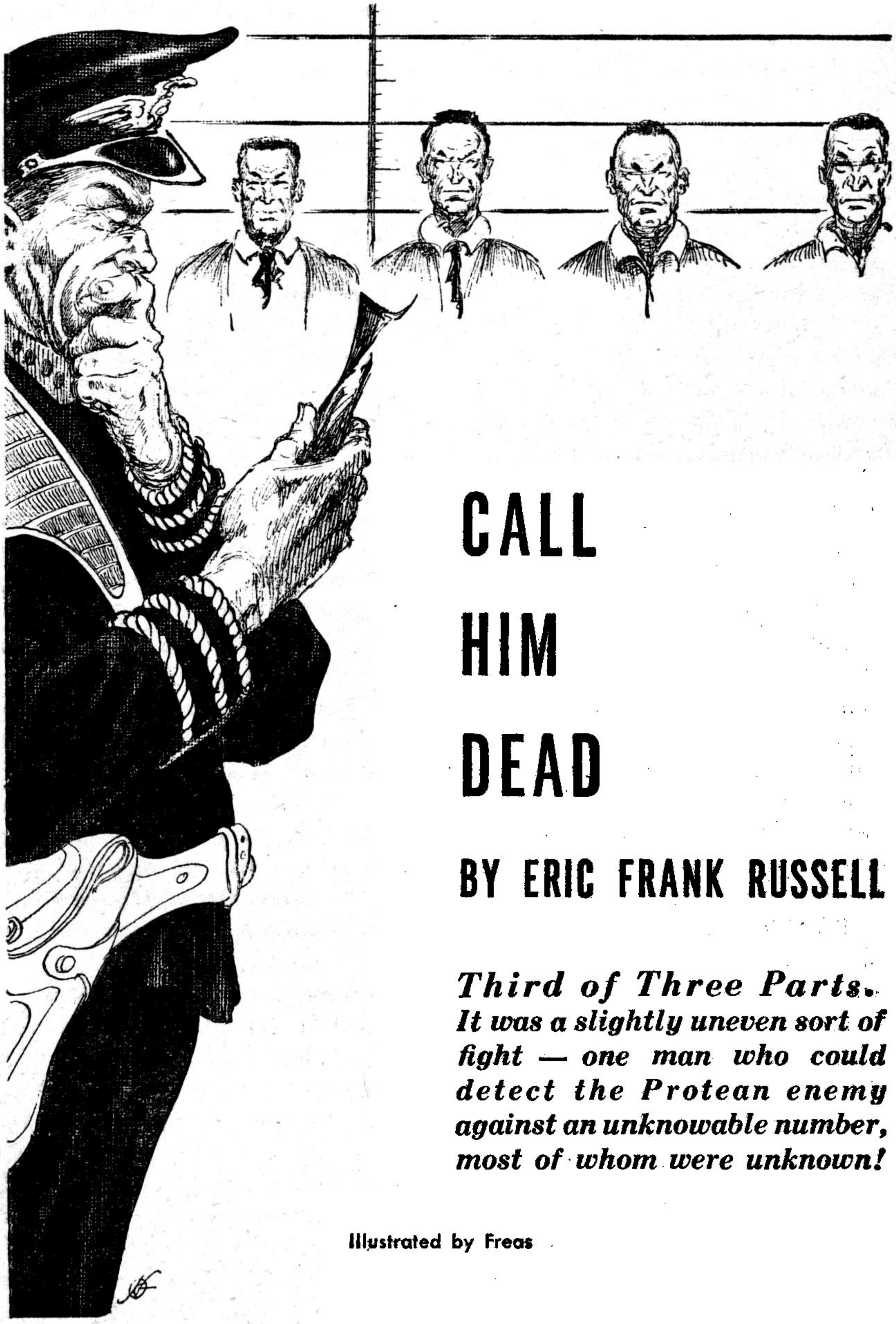
The paranoid personality won't fall, either; he's suspicious of everyone around him. He doesn't trust anybody, has a sullen resentment of all those other drivers.

Highway hypnosis is particularly adapted to killing the "Good Joes" —the ones who are doing a good job in life, and respect the other fellow on the road, who don't have the nagging worries of failures and anger to distract them. Intelligent people, who can concentrate on a job, and work at it till it's done. The very strengths that make them the kind of people the human race needs—these are the factors that allow highway hypnosis to trap and destroy them. The moron, the criminal, the paranoid—they're safe. The scatterbrained and the sullen failure in life—they're safe.

In the meantime, I, personally, intend to do everything I can to get this problem cracked. And I most earnestly invite your help in the job; check the statements made in this article, and I believe you'll find they're solid.

The statements anent Joe Kearney I can vouch for; he was my stepson.

John W. Campbell, Jr.



CALL HIM DEAD

BY ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

Third of Three Parts.

It was a slightly uneven sort of fight — one man who could detect the Protean enemy against an unknowable number, most of whom were unknown!

Illustrated by Freas

SYNOPSIS

It is 1980. Wade Harper is a maker of micromanipulatory instruments and since early childhood has been a secret telepath. His supernormal powers enable him to discover a severely wounded state trooper named Bob Alderson who dies in his arms.

After being questioned by Captain Ledsom of the police, Harper makes brief investigation of his own. From an oldster in a filling station he learns of possible suspects, these being three men and a girl riding in a green Thunderbug car.

The men are described as young, pale-faced, intelligent, and attired in green and gray outfits that look like uniforms. The girl appeared to be badly frightened and her fear caused the oldster to report the incident to Alderson, who set off in pursuit.

Harper reports these facts to Ledsom who still views him as a suspect. Next day, Harper is picked up, taken before Ledsom who informs him that the girl has been traced and that her story has nothing to do with the murder. He releases Harper who returns home and resumes everyday life.

Lieutenant Riley, an old police friend, then calls and persuades Harper to try solve Alderson's murder. He points out that the other has already cleared up several crimes and can deal with this one in the same near-magical way. With much reluctance, Harper agrees. But he is troubled lest at long last the police should realize that he is telepathic.

Interviewing Alderson's widow in search of a motive, Harper learns nothing useful. He then goes to question the mysterious girl seen in the Thunderbug. Her name is Jocelyn Whittingham. Contacting her mind, he is immensely shocked. He shoots her without hesitation, leaves her dead, races to Washington while the newspapers and video set up a clamor for him.

Surrendering to the F. B. I., he gains interviews with Washington's higher echelons by revealing his telepathic powers. This is a personal sacrifice he would never make for anything less than what is on his mind. Jameson of the F. B. I. takes him before men holding the country's top secrets. From them, Harper learns of an expedition to Venus due to return in the near future. The ship's crew of three closely resemble the trio of suspects in the Alderson murder case.

Harper then declares that the ship is already back, its crew dead and their bodies in possession of a Venusian life form. He denies that he could have murdered Jocelyn Whittingham because she was already dead and her body in alien ownership. The world, he adds, is now threatened with slow, surreptitious confiscation.

The top brass cannot credit these statements but is willing to dig the crew's photographs out of secret files and make a check by showing them to the filling station witness. While this is being arranged Harper moodily ponders the fact that his own life is no longer worth a hoot. He has been widely advertised as the Whit-

tingham girl's murderer. From the viewpoint of invading Venusians that meant he had shot one of their compulsory converts. They'd take alarm at that. They'd want to know how a Venusian could be identified, even in human form, also what measures they could take against it. Harper himself was the only reliable source of such information and they'd have to catch him and drag it out of him without delay.

The check proves positive, the witness identifying the crew's photographs as those of the men seen in the Thunderbug. Harper and Jameson are promptly taken before no less a person than General Conway himself. Conway is deeply concerned about the situation and, much to Harper's irritation, only little less disturbed by the existence of a telepath.

A nation-wide hunt for the three men and all their contacts is set up at once. Harper is conscripted by Conway to serve for the duration, he being the only one able to determine whether any suspect is human or Venusian. Within an hour or two the filling station witness is murdered in circumstances that may or may not be coincidental.

On Harper's advice, the F. B. I. pick up the entire Whittingham family and subject them to mental test by him. He declares them free of contamination and they are released. Harper then returns to his office which the F. B. I. has converted into a trap. With his secretary, Moira, unwittingly sharing the danger-spot, Harper carries on with business while functioning as bait for alien attention.

Meanwhile the search for the three intensifies. They are William Gould, Cory McDonald and Earl James Langley. All forces of law and order have been provided with complete details of them and are concentrating on the hunt to the exclusion of everything else. Lieutenant Riley visits Harper and tries to discover the reasons why the three are so badly wanted, but Harper refuses information. In Savannah, Georgia, the F. B. I. pick up the trail of Langley, who is trapped and killed in company with two men named Scaife and Waggoner.

Personally guarded by F. B. I. agents Norris and Rausch, Harper spends a few days of tedious waiting and much telepathic probing of the area around his office before eventually he detects the slow, cautious approach of an alien mind. He shocks it into self-revealment and at once the other tries to flee with the news that Venusians can be identified mentally. The trap closes but fails to take the prey alive. All they have to show for it is the body of an unknown man.

Taking Harper on a tour of local car-parks, the agents flush out of hiding the dead man's car driven by a possessed companion. A fast pursuit ends in the death of this escapee who is then identified as Philip Baum, brother of Ambrose Baum, the man previously trapped and killed.

An immediate search of the Baum home proves futile. While Harper

and agents are in the house someone phones and demands, "Var silvin, Wend?" then cuts off in evident suspicion. The call is traced to the Baum's junk jewelry warehouse where an unknown person evidently has been waiting to learn the result of the Baums' venture into the trap. Prowl cars race to the warehouse but arrive too late. While there, Harper detects a faint smell of eucalyptus and then recalls that both the Baums had this odor. Agent Norris is unable to sense it, but Rausch says he had noticed it too, though he'd attached no importance to it. Believing that eucalyptus might be as attractive to Venusians as tobacco is to humans, advice is radiated to test all future suspects for such an odor.

Fingerprints are lifted from the Baum office and some are identified as those of Cory McDonald. The town is sealed off while the search for McDonald proceeds. An agent discovers the wanted man's hideout in a house belonging to people named Reed who, it is assumed, are under alien mastery. The F. B. I. stake the place, then find they came an hour too late, McDonald and the Reeds having left hurriedly earlier.

While the search continues, Harper resumes his dangerous role of bait in the trap. He points out to Norris and Rausch that Langley is dead, McDonald in hiding, but nothing whatever has been heard of Gould. This, he thinks, may be because Gould is the craftiest and most formidable of the trio.

Unimpressed, Norris says that Gould will trip up, if given enough time. Harper retorts that they can't afford to give time. Every day, every hour counts against humanity. Too much of it may swing the balance too far, condemning every Terrestrial to membership of the walking dead.

PART 3

X

Business was stalled yet again first thing the next morning—before Harper had time even to look through the mail. He arrived at the office, having been tailed by his escort all the way from home, removed his hat and made ready to sling it onto a hook.

"Don't let go," advised Norris. "Haul it back and stick it on your head. You're departing right away."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. They haven't seen fit to confide in me."

That was true enough. Norris' mind held no more information than that an official car had arrived to take Harper some place else, that he would be away the full day and that the guard was commanded to maintain its watch on the plant during his absence.

Harper did not argue the matter this time. Reluctantly he was becoming resigned to the situation. Replacing the hat, he went outside, entered the car in which sat only a driver.

As they moved off a second machine bearing four men followed close behind. Harper waved a satirical good-by to Norris who was stand-

ing on the sidewalk trying to puzzle out the reason for this peremptory removal of the bait from the trap. Around the corner a third car suddenly pulled out from the curb and took the lead. This one also held a hard-looking quartet.

"Quite a cavalcade," Harper remarked. "Somebody is according me the importance I've long deserved."

The driver made no response, concentrated solely on following the car ahead. He was a beetle-browed individual of the type that doesn't know the meaning of fear—or any other words. To the rear the third vehicle kept a careful twenty yards distant.

"A hundred dollars if you step on it and lose the entire bunch."

No reply. Not so much as a smile.

Giving it up, Harper slumped in his seat, half-closed his eyes while his mind felt around like invisible fingers. His own driver, he found, knew nothing except that he must keep on the tail of the leading machine, be prepared for trouble and on no account face it if he could run out of it.

The fingers explored farther.

Those in the leading car knew where the procession was heading. And from that moment, so did Harper. He mulled the new-found knowledge a minute or two, dismissed the purpose as something he would learn in due course, gazed idly through the door-glass at passing shops and pedestrians. With habit born of the last few days he made a mental sweep of the neighborhood every now and again.

They had passed through two sets of traffic lights and over a dozen cross streets when alien impulses reached him, weak with distance but discernible. Something high up that side-road, six, eight or maybe ten hundred yards away. Something that flashed pseudo-human thoughts in spasms with gigglings and gobblings between.

He sat up red-faced and snapped, "Quick! Turn up there!"

Beetle-brows firmed his thick lips, gave a warning toot on his horn and speeded up. Two faces peered through the rear window of the car ahead which likewise increased its pace. They whizzed across the road without turning and continued straight on.

"You're too slow to keep up with your own boots," commented Harper, sharp-eyed and still listening. "Take this next turn. Make it fast. We can buzz round the block and get him before he fades out."

The car plunged on. It ignored the turn and the next and the next. The faraway squirming mind thinned into nothingness and was lost.

"You bladderhead!" swore Harper. "You've missed a prize chance."

No retort.

He gave it up, lapsed into ireful silence, wondered whether the brief emanations he'd picked up had come from McDonald himself or from yet another of his unsuspected dupes. There was no way of telling. Such minds do not reveal themselves in terms of human identity. All that could be said for certain was that a

mortal enemy wandered loose despite that the whole town was beginning to resemble an armed camp.

Surliness remained with him two hours later when the cars rolled through a strongly guarded gateway in a heavily fenced area, went over a small hill and stopped before a cluster of buildings hidden from sight of the main road. A painted board stood beside the main entrance.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
Biological Research Laboratories

The four from the pilot car escorted him through the doors in the wary manner of men convinced that given half a chance he would take wings and fly. More people given only part of the story and exaggerating the rest, he decided.

He took a chair in the waiting room and sat watched by three of them while the fourth went in search of someone else. In due time the latter returned with a white-coated, gray-haired individual who registered prompt surprise.

"Wade Harper! Well I'm blessed!"

"What's dumfounding about it?" growled Harper. "You weren't soul-shaken last time we met four years back."

One of the escort chipped in, saying, "If you and Dr. Leeming already know each other, you don't need an introduction. So we'll get along." He went out, taking the others with him.

Leeming explained, "My instructions are to make a check with the help of a specialist who would be brought here this morning. I am given to understand that what he says must be treated as decisive. The specialist's identity wasn't revealed." He backed off a short way, looked the other up and down. "And it's you. Four years haven't done you any good. You look older and uglier."

"So would you if you were in my britches." Harper gave a sniff of discontent, went on, "I came like royalty, under strong protection. Toughies to the front of me, toughies to the back of me, and for all I know there was a fleet of helicopters parading overhead. All that rigmarole wasn't so you could hand me another problem about how to shave the whiskers off a bacillus. Moreover, my mercenary instinct tells me you aren't aiming to give me a repeat order for twelve thousand dollars' worth of apparatus. So what's this all about?"

"I'll show you." Dr. Leeming beckoned. "Come along."

Taking him through a series of corridors, Leeming conducted him into a long room cluttered with scientific glassware, stainless steel instruments and, Harper swiftly noted, a few silk-lined cases of his own especial products. A young man, white-coated, bespectacled and serious, glanced up nervously as they entered.

"My assistant, Dr. Balir," introduced Leeming. "Meet Wade Harper." He gestured toward a nearby micromanipulator and its array of ac-

cessories. "He's the fellow who makes this stuff."

Balir looked suitably impressed, said, "Glad to know you."

"Then you may number yourself among a select few," Harper responded.

"Take no notice," Leeming advised Balir. "He says the first thing that pops into his head."

"Hence the general ruckus," commented Harper, "seeing what's been popping of late." He stared around. "Well, why am I here?"

Leeming went to a large cabinet, took from it a photograph blown up to full-plate size, handed it over for inspection. It showed a fuzzy white sphere with a band of slight discoloration across its middle.

"A picture of the planet Jupiter," Harper hazarded, momentarily too preoccupied to check his guess by mental probing.

"On the contrary," informed Leeming, "it is something far smaller, though massive enough as such things go. That's an electron-microscope's view of a protein molecule."

"If you want to dissect it you're right out of luck. I can't get down to any method of handling things *that* tiny."

"More's the pity," said Leeming. "But that's not what we're after."

Returning the photo to the cabinet he turned to a heavy steel safe set in the wall. Opening it carefully, he took out a transparent plastic sealed container in which was a wadded test tube one quarter filled with a clear, colorless liquid.

"This," he announced, "is the same thing multiplied a millionfold. Does it mean anything to you?"

Harper peered at the fluid. "Not a thing."

"Consider carefully," Leeming advised. "Because to the best of our belief this is still alive."

"Alive?"

"By that, I mean potent. It is a virus extracted from the brainpans and spinal cords of certain bodies."

"A recognizable virus?"

"No."

"Filterable?"

"We did not attempt to filter it. We isolated it by a new centrifugal process."

"Then if it's not dead it's still dizzy from being whirled," said Harper. "Let me try again when it has come to its senses."

"Ah! That's precisely what we want to know. *Has* it any senses? My information is that you and you alone can tell us." He frowned and continued, "I have my orders which say that it is for you to pronounce the verdict. If you say that this virus is innocuous, it means either that it has been rendered so by processing and isolation or, alternatively, that we're on the wrong track and must start all over again."

Harper said, "Anyway, you don't have to stand there holding it out at arm's length like a man who's just dug up a dead cat. Put it back in its coffin and screw down the lid. It will make not the slightest difference to my ability to weigh it up. If that stuff were willing and able to advertise its

suspected nature, I could have told you about it in the waiting room without bothering to come this near."

Doing as bidden, Leeming fastened the steel safe, spread expressive hands, "So we're no farther than at the beginning?"

"Not necessarily," Harper replied. Leaning against a lab bench, he put on a musing expression while he picked the minds of both Leeming and Balir. Then he said, "You've been told that three space-explorers have returned from Venus afflicted with a possessive disease which is spreading. They have sent you bodies of known victims, starting with a girl named Joyce Whittingham. Your job is to isolate what's doing it, learn its nature and, if possible, devise a cure."

"Correct," admitted Leeming. "It's top secret information. Evidently you've been given it too."

"Given it? I took it with both hands. And it was like pulling teeth." Harper leaned forward, eyed him intently. "Are you positive that you have extracted the real cause in the form of that virus?"

"I was fairly certain—until your arrival. Now I'm not."

"What made you so sure?"

"No words of mine can tell you how thoroughly we've dealt with those corpses. The task was made doubly difficult by virtue of everything having to be handled remotely, with every possible precaution against direct contact and contamination. We've had our leading experts on the job twenty-four hours per day and they've done it down to the last fragment of flesh, blood, bone, skin and hair. All we've got to show for it is a formerly unknown virus. That could be it. That should be it." He paused, finished, "But according to you, it isn't."

"I haven't said so."

"You said it meant nothing to you."

"Neither does it—in its present state." Harper hesitated, continued, "I have the peculiar power to recognize persons afflicted with this disease. If they've not told you how I can do it, I cannot either. Call it another top secret. The world's getting crammed with top secrets. However, I can tell you one thing."

"What's that?"

"I recognize the symptoms. You're asking me to put a finger on the cause. It's not the same thing, not by a long chalk. So far as I'm concerned it's a quite different problem."

"Well, can you help with any suggestions?" asked Leeming.

"I can give you my ideas. It's up to you to decide whether they make sense or nonsense."

"Let's have them. We need every angle we can get."

"All right. Understand that I'm not criticizing you people in any way when I say that I think the authorities rushed me here because they'd jumped to a silly conclusion."

"What conclusion?"

"That you can undress when you're stark naked. That you can swim with-

out water. That you can pedal down the road without a bicycle between your legs."

"Be more explicit," Leeming suggested.

"You can't be a disease when you've nothing to work upon. You can't run without legs, talk without a mouth, think without brains. If that stuff is what you believe it to be, and what for all I know it really may be, it's hamstrung, tied up, fastened down, gagged, slugged and bollixed. It is, therefore, no more than what it appears to be, namely, a dollop of goo. Its power, if any, has ceased to be actual and become only potential. I can detect an actuality. But I can't sit in judgment upon potentiality any more than I can read the future."

"I see what you mean." Leeming put on a slow smile. "You don't give us credit for overmuch intelligence, do you?"

"I haven't defined you as stupid. I'm merely theorizing about my own inability to help."

"All right." Leeming waved a hand toward the steel safe. "That's not all we've got. It's only half of it. We used the rest for a time-honored purpose: we tried it on the dog."

"You mean you've actually squirted it into someone?"

"Yes, a dog, as I've just said."

Harper gazed at him defeatedly. In all his life he had never picked up a thought radiating from any of the lower animals. Telepathically, the dogs and cats, the birds and bees just did not exist. They cerebrated somewhere above or below the human waveband. He could no more listen to their minds working than he could see beyond the ultraviolet.

"What happened to it?"

"It lived. It's still living. Like to see it?"

"Yes, I would."

The dog proved to be a black Labrador retriever imprisoned in a heavy cage apparently commandeered from a circus or from some nearby zoo. The cage had a steel floor, heavy steel bars on all sides and across the top, also a sliding mid-gate by means of which the animal could be pinned in one half of its quarters while the other half was being cleaned, its food and water bowls replenished. The Labrador looked incongruous and not a little pathetic in surroundings formidable enough to hold an irate rhinoceros.

Noticing the approaching pair, the dog turned to face them, pawed at the bars, wagged its tail vigorously and emitted a pleading whine. A perfect picture of canine friendliness, it concentrated its attention particularly upon Harper, subjecting him to all the appeal of a pet-shop pup begging to be bought.

"Any comments?" inquired Leeming.

"If appearance is anything to go by, you injected it with nothing more dangerous than dill-water."

"Within the limits of that condition, I agree. But can we place faith in appearances? You've said that you can recognize an actuality. Well, this dog is actual enough. So what is your diagnosis?"

"I can't give one," said Harper. "It's no use me trying to smell out witches among the canine species. My power functions only with respect to a two-legged creature very much like myself but less hairy."

"Hm-m-m!" Leeming eyed the Labrador which now was standing on its hind legs, forepaws against bars, and openly inviting Harper to take it out for a walk. He frowned deeply, said, "Notice how all its attention is on you and how it is ignoring me?"

"That's natural. I'd prefer me to you if I were a dog."

"I'm not joking," Leeming assured. "I'm deadly serious."

"Why?"

"We shot a dose of virus into that animal at noon yesterday. We did it in that cage, got out fast and watched results from this side the bars."

"And what happened?"

"It behaved normally at first, licked the spot where we'd inserted the needle, wandered aimlessly around and threw us those looks of bewildered reproof which some dogs give when they think they've been kicked for nothing. After four minutes it collapsed, had a violent fit during which its body jerked spasmodically, it foamed at the mouth and gave muffled yelps."

"After that?"

"It recovered with surprising swiftness," Leeming detailed. "It went ten times around the cage, examining every part of it and obviously seeking a means of escape. Finding none, it snarled at Balir who happened to be standing nearest. It gave a display of ferocious hatred that had to be seen to be believed. Dill-water or not, it

certainly wasn't the same dog as before."

"It seems mild enough now," Harper pointed out.

"I know. And that is highly significant, I believe. It raged against Balir. Then it turned its fury upon me. For a couple of hours it gave a display of maniac enmity toward anyone and everyone who came in sight. The emotional reaction to entrapment, see?"

"Could be."

"But after those couple of hours it changed character with the swift dexterity of an actor changing costumes between acts. The hatred vanished. The dog did its darnedest to ingratiate itself with Balir and put on so good a performance that he began to pity it. Knowing or sensing the effect, it redoubled its efforts to gain his friendship. However, Balir is a scientist. He refused to let himself be influenced by irrational sentiment. Therefore he did not respond."

"What did it do next?" Harper asked.

"It transferred its cajolings to me. I'll admit without shame that I had moments of feeling sorry for it—until I remembered that my sympathy could be expressed in only two ways, namely, to get within reach and fondle it, which might be most dangerous, or to release it, which could well be downright disastrous. So I remained hard."

"Is that all?"

"No. Early this morning it tried all its best tricks on Jim Calthorpe who tends to its feeding. Calthorpe had been warned to use the slide gate and keep out of the dog's reach no matter what. He refused to respond to its overtures. Now it is picking on you in your turn." Leeming glanced at the other and asked, "What do you deduce from such behavior?"

"Constructive thought," Harper replied. "It has satisfied itself that escape is impossible without help. Its only chance is to find a weakling who'll coöperate. So it is testing the various candidates in order of arrival."

"That's what I suspect. But if we are correct, if it is being purposefully selective in its appeals, isn't that just a bit too clever for the average dog?"

"I don't know. I really don't know. As I told you before, I am no expert on canines. All I do know is that some dogs are alleged to be mighty smart and quite capable of coping with moderately complicated problems. Almost human is the conventional description for them."

"Yes, but the exceptionally intelligent dog has developed its mental status almost from birth. It hasn't acquired it all of a sudden, like being fitted with a new collar."

"Well?"

"This particular animal was as average a specimen as you could find in a long day's march. Now it's better than average. It has jumped from Dog I. Q. 60 to Dog I. Q. 100 or more. That is somewhat alarming in view of the circumstances. It points to a conclusion we hoped you could confirm. We are going to have a diffi-

cult time proving it without your help."

"There's a satisfactory way out," Harper suggested, "if anyone has the guts to take it."

"And what may that be?"

"Knock off that hound, recover the hell-juice from it, resquirt it into a human being. Or if you can spare the stuff you showed me in the lab, use that and save yourself time and trouble."

"Impossible!" declared Leeming.

"Show me an injected human being and I can tell you positively whether or not you have tracked down and isolated the real cause of all the trouble."

"Unthinkable!" Leeming said.

"Don't talk silly," Harper reproved. "How can it be unthinkable seeing that I've thought of it?"

"You know what I mean. We cannot subject a fellow being to such a drastic test."

"It's a bit late for science to start taking count of moral considerations. The time for that was fifty years ago. Today, one more dirty trick will pass unnoticed. The public has got used to the idea that we've all degenerated to a bunch of guinea pigs."

Leeming let that pass with no more than a disapproving frown, then said, "It might be all right if we could get a volunteer. Where are we going to find one? Would *you* offer your body for this?"

"I would not. And even if I were daft enough to submit I would not be permitted to do so. Uncle Sam thinks me too precious to lose." He tapped Leeming's chest with a heavy forefinger. "And that fact alone suggests where you may get your experimental carcase, namely, from among those who aren't precious, those whose loss won't matter a hoot to anyone, even to themselves."

"What do you mean?"

"There are thugs in the death house waiting to be hung, electrocuted or gassed. Offer any of them the one-in-a-thousand chance to gain release and watch him jump at it. Tell him that you want him to take a squirt. If he goes under, well, he's facing that as it is. But, if you can cure him, he'll be given a pardon and freed. Maybe Old Whiskers will find him a government job as a reward for public service."

"I have no authority to make such an extrajudicial bargain."

"Somebody has. Find him and keep kicking his pants until he wakes up."

"I doubt whether anyone less than the President could do it and even he'd have to stretch his powers to the limit."

"All right. Then chivvy the President. If you don't go after him somebody else will—and for a more formidable purpose."

"Look, Wade, talk comes cheap. Performance is a different matter altogether. Have you ever tried moving the top brass?"

"Yes."

"How far did you get?" Leeming asked with interest.

"I reached General Conway and

got him on the hop good and proper. Come to think of it, he's the boy to ask for a hunk of forked meat. Tell him exactly what's happened here, what I've said to you, what you want to do about it. Tell him your test-subject has got to be a man and nothing less than a man. Dump the problem right in his lap and tell him that so far as you're concerned he's stuck with it. He won't nurse it any longer than he can help, you can bet on that!"

Harper studied the dog again while letting Leeming think it over. The Labrador whined, made pawing motions between the bars. It looked every inch a dog and nothing else save a dog. But that was no proof for or against. Elsewhere slunk creatures who bore equally close resemblance to people but were not people. The number one question: was this animal still a mere dog or had it become in effect a weredog?

He tried to listen to its mind as it begged his attention and he heard precisely nothing. A blank, a complete blank. His natural range of reception just wasn't wide enough to pick up emanations from other than his own species. He switched from listening and probed at it sharply, fiercely, in manner that had brought immediate reaction from hiders in human shape. It had no effect upon the dog which continued its fawning with obvious unconsciousness of his mental stabbing.

The silent experiment served only to confirm what he had already known: that the canine brain functions solely with respect of its own kind and that the so-called ability of dogs to read thoughts is no more than an expert appraisal of gestures, expressions, mannerisms and vocal tones. Because of that the Labrador represented a sterile line of research upon which Leeming had entered in good faith but little chance of satisfactory conclusion. Having got this far it could be taken no farther. Another and more progressive line must involve a higher form of life.

Leeming broke into his meditation by saying, "I don't like it and I don't think I'll get away with it. Nevertheless I am willing to bait Conway providing you're standing by to back me up. He might listen to you when he won't to me."

"You don't know until you've tried."

"I do know that I am a scientist while he is a military figurehead. We don't talk the same language. The academic voice reasons while the voice of authority barks. If he can't or won't understand what I'm trying to explain and needs some cussing to make head or tail of it, you take the phone and use the necessary swear words."

"Conway isn't that dopey," Harper assured. "High rank doesn't create a hollowhead despite certain exceptions that prove the rule."

"Let's go to my office," suggested Leeming. "You get hold of him, then I'll see what can be done."

Harper called Jameson first, said, "I'm at the Biological Research Lab-

oratories as probably you are aware, you having had something to do with bringing me here. I'm going to put through a call to General Conway. Dr. Leeming wants a brief talk with him."

"Then why get on to me?" Jameson asked.

"Because I've tried to reach Conway before, remember? And neither Leeming nor I have the time or patience to be bollixed around by every underling in Washington. It's up to you to tell them to shove my call straight through."

"See here, Harper—"

"Shut up!" Harper ordered. "You've used me plenty. Now I'm using you. Get busy and do as you're told."

He slammed the instrument onto its rack, sat in a handy chair, scowled at the phone and snorted.

Leeming said apprehensively, "Who is this Jameson?"

"A big cheese in the F. B. I."

"And *you* tell *him* where *he* gets off?"

"It's the first time," said Harper. "And from what I know of him it'll also be the last." He brooded a bit, darkened in color and snapped, "Anyway, why should one bunch of guys do all the order-giving and another all the order-taking? Time we reversed roles once in a while, isn't it? Is this a democracy or am I deluded?"

"Now, now," protested Leeming, "don't pick on me. I just accept things as they are."

"Like hell you do. If some of you scientists had been more content to leave well alone we'd all—" He let the rest go unsaid, chewed his bottom lip a piece, finished, "Take no notice. Once a month I have to give forth or go bang. Jameson's had long enough to insure some action. If he hasn't taken steps by now, he doesn't intend to."

"My bet is that he's done nothing."

"The odds are greatly in your favor, much as I hate to admit it." Harper regained the phone. "Anyway, we'll see."

His call went through, a youthful face appeared in his instrument's visiscreen.

"My name is Wade Harper," he told the face. "I want to speak to General Conway and it's urgent."

"Just a moment, please." The face went away, was replaced by another, older, more officious.

"About what do you wish to talk to the general?" inquired the newcomer.

"What's it to do with you?" demanded Harper, toughly. "Go straight to Connie and find out once and for all whether or not he will condescend to have a word with me."

"I'm afraid I cannot do that unless I can first brief him on the subject matter of your—" The face ceased talking, glanced sidewise, said hurriedly, "Pardon me a moment," and disappeared. A few seconds later it returned wearing a startled expression. "Hold on, Mr. Harper. We're switching you through as speedily as possible."

Harper grinned at the now empty screen and said to Leeming, "Looks like you've lost your bet. Jameson got into motion although a bit slow at it."

"That surprises me."

"It surprises me, too. And it goes to show something or other if I had time to think it out."

The visiscreen registered eccentric patterns as the line was switched through intercom-boards, then cleared and held General Conway's austere features.

"What is it, Mr. Harper?"

Giving a short, succinct explanation, Harper handed the phone to Leeming who detailed the current state of affairs, ended by expressing his need for a human subject and the hope that Conway could do something about it.

"I disapprove such a tactic," declared Conway, flatly.

Leeming reddened and said, "In that case, general, we can make no more progress. We are balked."

"Nonsense, man! I appreciate your desire and the ingenuity of what you suggest. But I cannot spend valuable hours seeking some legal means of making use of a condemned felon when such a move is superfluous and unnecessary."

"I make the request only because I deem it necessary," Leeming pointed out.

"You are wrong. You have been sent four bodies of known victims. Two more have become available today and you will receive them shortly. With the spread of this peril and the increase in number of people affected it becomes inevitable that before long we shall succeed in capturing one alive. What more could you want than that?"

Leeming sighed and persisted patiently, "A live victim would help but not conclusively. The most incontrovertible proof of a cause is a demonstration that it creates the characteristic effect. I cannot demonstrate contagion with the aid of a subject already riddled with it."

"Perhaps not," agreed Conway. "But such a subject, being more communicative than a dog, can be compelled to identify the cause himself. It should not be beyond your wit to devise a suitable technique for enforcing what might be termed self-betrayal."

"Offhand I can think of only one way to achieve that," Leeming said. "And the trouble with it is that it's likely to be long and tedious and it will mean considerable working in the dark."

"What method?"

"Assuming that this virus is the true cause—which is still a matter of doubt—we must seek an effective antigen. Our proof will then rest upon our ability to cure the live specimen. If we fail—"

"A cure has *got* to be found," asserted Conway, in manner making it final and beyond all dispute. "Somehow, anyhow. The only alternative is long-term, systematic extermination of all victims on an eventual scale that none dare contemplate. Indeed,

we could well be faced by a majority problem far too large for a minority to overcome, in which case the minority is doomed and humanity along with it."

"And you think that the life of one hardened criminal is too high a price to pay for freedom from that fate?" asked Leeming, shrewdly.

"I think nothing of the sort," Conway contradicted. "I would unhesitatingly sacrifice the entire populations of our prisons had I the power to do so and were I convinced that it was our only hope. But I have not the power and I am not convinced of the necessity."

"Let me speak to him," urged Harper, seeing Leeming's look of despair. He got the phone, gazed belligerently at the face in the screen knowing that it was now looking at his own. "General Conway, you say you lack the power and you're not persuaded?"

"That is correct," Conway agreed.

"The President, if consulted, might think differently. He has the necessary authority or, if not, can obtain it. Aren't you usurping his right to make a decision about this?"

"Usurping?" Conway repeated the word as if it were the ultimate in insults. He gathered himself together with visible effort, spoke in tones of restraint, "The President cannot work more than twenty-four hours per day. Therefore he deputes certain of his powers and responsibilities. I am now exercising some of the authority so assigned."

"By virtue of which you have his ear while others have not," Harper riposted. "So how about putting the matter to him?"

"No."

"All right. I am no longer asking you to do so. I am telling you to do so."

"Telling me?" The other registered incredulity.

"That's what I said: I am telling you. Refusal to coöperate is a game at which two can play. You can take Leeming's proposition to the President or count me out of this fracas as from now."

"You cannot do that."

"I can."

"You know full well that we're dependent upon you to make positive identification where opportunity arises. You cannot possibly stand idly by knowing what's happening, watching it happen and doing nothing."

"I can. And what's more, I shall. You aren't the only one who can make like a mule."

"This is outrageous!" General Conway exploded.

"It's mutinous, too," endorsed Harper, showing indecent relish. "It's barefaced treachery. You could have me shot for it. Try it and see what good it does you. I'd be even less useful dead than dumb." He smiled happily.

Conway breathed heavily while his face showed exasperation, then he said, "Against my better judgment I will take this up with the President and do my best to persuade him. I promise to try get the required ac-

tion with minimum of delay but I offer no guarantee of success."

"Your word is plenty good enough for me," said Harper. "You're an officer and a gentleman. And in our antagonistic ways we're both working for the same end, aren't we?"

He got a grunt of irritation for that, put down the phone, eyed Leeming. "He'll do it. He's the sort who sticks to a promise like grim death once it's been forced out of him. With some men, it isn't worth the trouble of getting a promise."

"You've got a nerve," offered Leeming, showing a touch of envy. "You've got so much nerve I wonder you've any friends. Some day you'll push it too far and somebody will slap your skull into its underlying mess."

"What are you talking about? Conway's a man and I'm a man. We both get haircuts, both wear pants. Once upon a time we both bawled and had our diapers changed. And we'll both smell as bad a month after we're dead. Am I supposed to kiss his feet inbetweentimes?"

"No, I suppose not."

"Then we're in sweet agreement." He consulted his wrist watch. "Before I go there's one thing I'd like to know, if you can tell me."

"What's that?"

"How does this progressive disease become epidemic? How is it passed from one to another?"

"The same way as the dog got it," Leeming informed. "That girl Joyce Whittingham had received an injection in the upper arm, presumably with the blood of a victim."

"We can't say for certain that the dog has got it."

"No, but we do know the Whittingham girl had it. And we know she'd received an injection. So had two others. The fourth corpse had a plaster-covered cut that told the same story. My guess is that their reactions were the same as the dog's, a few minutes' confusion, collapse into a brief fit, rapid recovery."

"Well, the fact that contact alone evidently is not sufficient helps a little," mused Harper. "It means a prospect can't be taken just by sneezing in his direction. He has to be grabbed and held long enough to receive and get over a shot, eh? Downright lucky for us."

Leeming nodded and went on, "If this virus is not the actual cause it's a definite by-product, and if it's not the cause, well"—he spread hands expressively—"we're at a complete loss for any other."

"Anything else you can tell me about it?"

"Yes. It locates itself in the brain and spinal column. That is its natural habitat. The rest is theory and you can have it for what it's worth. I believe that the virus increases until it overflows into the bloodstream and thereby creates an urge to transmit the surplus, to seek another circulatory system leading to another brain and spinal column. You can think of it as the nonhuman equivalent of sexual desire, the actual transference being a substitute for copulation. It's

the irresistible response to the universal law: be fruitful and multiply."

"Humph!" Harper stewed that a while. He was curious about how transmission from creature to creature was accomplished on the world of origin. Did the preferred hosts on Venus take the shape of a life form high enough to manufacture and manipulate hypodermic needles? Or were they something lower in the scale of life, something peculiarly fanged and able to transmit impregnated blood with a single bite?

He suspected the latter. No matter how alien from the Terrestrial viewpoint, this plague was born of Nature, designed to exist in masterful symbiosis with a similarly evolved partner. Therefore the mode of increase was likely to be natural rather than artificial and the injection-technique used on Earth was nothing but a substitute justified by proving satisfactory.

If all these bald assumptions happened to be correct, that imprisoned dog might well be capable of creating its own rescuer and much-wanted ally by getting in one good snap at an unwary leg or by licking a hand on which was a minute cut. The presence of virus in its saliva could open the gates to freedom and a wholesale conversion of human forms. Theoretically the animal was more dangerous than a cobalt bomb.

"If you want my advice," he said to Leeming, "you'd do well to put an end to that dog before it puts an end to you."

"Don't worry. We're used to cop-

ing with such matters here. Nobody goes near enough to be spat upon, much less touched."

"You know your own business. And it's high time I resumed tending to mine. I am going home, back to the trap that Conway hopes will catch a live one." Harper let go a harsh chuckle. "If I'm dead out of luck, they may bring you a struggling zombie that will prove to be me."

"What d'you mean?" inquired Leeming, wide-eyed.

"Never mind. Let's find the escort. If I return without them, there'll be the deuce to pay." He glanced at the ceiling as if appealing to heaven. "What a world!"

XI

Rausch was hanging around the office when Harper arrived in the morning. He said, "We stayed put until eight last evening thinking you'd be sure to return here. If your guard hadn't advised us that they'd delivered you safely home, we'd have been stuck in this dump all night."

"What with one thing and another, including three stops *en route,* I got back too late." Hanging his hat, Harper sat at his desk, reached for the mail. "Where's Norris? How come you're here? I thought you were making an ambush of the Baum place?"

"We've abandoned hope of catching anyone there. The news about the Baums appeared in yesterday's late editions and got reported as an automobile smash. A pic of the wrecked car being towed away was shown in the pane's midnight summary. Despite the cover-up it's more than enough to warn off the Baums' playmates. We'll grab nobody there if we try for a year."

"Well, all I can say is that some people appear pretty good at thwarting the Feds." Harper tore open a couple of envelopes, rapidly scanned their contents. "They're much too sharp for my liking. And they're playing hob with my pet theory that basically all criminals are dopes." Then he glanced up from a letter, added thoughtfully, "If this bunch can properly be called criminals."

"How else can you describe them?"

"As a menace. A red-hot menace. Like a gang of dogs with rabies. Or a group of smallpox carriers hiding from the health authorities. But worse than that, infinitely worse." He reread the letter, dumped it into a wire basket. "Where did you say Norris has gone?"

"I didn't say. If it's any satisfaction to you, he has dashed out on what is probably another fruitless trip."

"What do you mean by 'another'?"

"Yesterday, while you were absent," explained Rausch, "the boys picked up no less than eight alleged McDonalds. It would have been a top-notch performance if any one of them had turned out to be McDonald. But none were. Half an hour ago Norris rushed away for a look at number nine."

"How's he checking?"

"Easily enough. He has mug-shots, prints and so forth. He's got sufficient to pin down the right one beyond all shadow of doubt. We've not yet laid hands on the right one."

"I'd give much to know how he's keeping out of reach," Harper observed. "The technique might prove to be extremely useful to me some day."

Rausch stared at him. "What's on your mind?"

"Embezzlement." Then he gave a false laugh. "But of course. How silly of me. If I abscond with this outfit's money, I'm merely taking my own. Which proves yet again that an employer can do no wrong. Think it over."

"I am thinking," informed Rausch, suspiciously. "And I think you're kidding me. I also think it isn't funny."

"It wasn't intended to be." He grabbed more mail, ripped off the covers. "Anything else happened that I ought to know about?"

"Your police friend Riley called in the afternoon, became nosey about where you'd gone."

"Did you tell him?"

"How could we? We didn't know ourselves. And even if we'd possessed the information we wouldn't have given it. He is not entitled to be told."

"Did he state the purpose of his visit?"

"No. I got the impression that it was just a casual drop-in for a gab. He said he'd call again today. He fooled around trying to make your secretary then went."

Harper dropped the letter he was holding, eyed Rausch sharply. "Say that again, the bit about my secretary."

"Riley horsed about with her a bit then departed."

"Never! Never in a month of Sundays! He wouldn't make a pass at Moira if she begged him to eat her. That's why I kid him about it. He's so solidly married that it's boring."

"He did," asserted Rausch. "Maybe the solidity is becoming slightly undermined."

Harper relaxed, said, "You've made a point there. Moira is due to arrive in about ten minutes. I'll ask her about this."

"I don't see the need. Not unless you've a lien on her love-life."

"The bond between us is firmly based upon a mutual affection for hard cash," Harper informed. "That and no more."

"Have it your own way," said Rausch, shrugging. He mooched into the workshop, amused himself watching micromanipulators being assembled, came back when Moira appeared.

Waiting until she had settled herself behind her typewriter, Harper asked, "What is this about you and Riley?"

She was taken aback. "I don't understand, Mr. Harper."

"I'm told the lumbering elephant made a play for you."

"Oh, no, not really." She gained a

slight flush. "He only joshed me a bit. I knew he meant nothing by it."

"But he's never done that before, has he?"

"No, Mr. Harper. I think he was just filling in time, not finding you here."

Harper leaned forward, gazing at her but not picking her mind. "Did he try to date you?"

She was shocked and a little indignant. "Certainly not. He did offer me a theater ticket someone had given him. He said he wasn't able to use it and I could have it."

"Did you accept it?"

"No. It was for last night. I had a date already and couldn't go."

"Was he disappointed when you refused the ticket?"

"Not that I noticed." Her attention shifted to the listening Rausch then back to Harper, her features expressing bafflement. "What is all this, anyway?"

"Nothing much, Lanky. I am trying to determine whether Riley was drunk or sober yesterday afternoon. It's an interesting speculation because never in my life have I known him to get stinko."

"A person doesn't have to be drunk to notice my existence," she gave back more than pointedly.

"That's the baby!" approved Rausch, coming in on her side. "You landed that one right on the button."

"Keep your beak out of my domestic affairs," ordered Harper. He picked up a letter, wet his lips. "Forget it, Moira. Let's get down to business. Take this reply to the Vester Clinic. Replacement titanium-alloy needles for Model Fourteen are immediately available in sets of six. We quote you—"

He had finished dictating and was presiding in the workshop when Norris returned sour-faced and said, "You wouldn't think so many people could have a superficial but passable resemblance to one wanted man."

"Meaning they'd grabbed another dud?"

"Yes. A paint-drummer sufficiently like McDonald to make the pinch excusable. Moreover, he was in a devil of a hurry, lost his temper, tried to crash a road-block. That was his undoing."

"Look," said Harper, "McDonald escaped loaded with luggage and had at least an hour's start. Do you really suppose that he is still in this town?"

"No, I don't. I reckon the chances are a hundred to one against it. Not only have we found no trace of him but none of the Reeds or their car either. I think they slipped through the cordon and are now way out in the wilds. But we're passing up no chances no matter how remote."

"All right. Then I'll tell you something: if those three have escaped they've left at least one contact here."

"How do you know that?" Norris demanded.

"Because we whizzed past one yesterday. I tried to get the cavalcade to go after him but they refused to stop. They had their orders and they stuck to them. It shows how blind obedience can make a hash of initiative."

Norris did not like that last re-

mark but let it go by and inquired, "Did you get any clue to his identity?"

"Not a one. If I had, I'd have told you last night and saved your time. He might be anybody, anybody at all. The best I can do is guess."

"Go ahead and do some guessing. You've made a few lucky shots so far."

"This is a wild one fired entirely at random," Harper told him, almost apologetically. "I can't get rid of the idea that about the safest place in the world for a hunted man is a town where every man jack is hunting for some other character. He benefits from the general distraction, see? His safety-factor is increased more than somewhat by virtue of the obvious fact that you can concentrate on one thing only by ignoring other things."

"Go on," urged Norris, truly interested.

"So if the presence of my carcase make this town an area of irresistible attraction to the opposition, and everyone here is chasing around in search of McDonald—"

"Finish it, man, finish it!"

"What a wonderful set-up for William Gould." Harper regarded the other levelly. "Who's looking for *him?*"

"The entire country. You know that."

"I'm not considering the entire country. I'm thinking only of this town. Unlike the rest of the country, it's obsessed by McDonald to such an extent that Gould could step in and baby-sit for you and you'd pay him two dollars with thanks." He drummed restless fingers on the desk while that sank in, then added for good measure, "After which it would never be the same baby again."

Rausch chipped in, "Whether that guess is on or off the mark makes no difference. Gould is wanted as badly as McDonald. It would do no harm to distribute a local reminder of that fact."

"It wouldn't at that," agreed Norris. "You go out and see to it right now." Norris watched Rausch hurry out then returned attention to Harper. "Where did you dig up these notions?"

"The onlooker sees the most of the game. And as I told you before, I've been on the run myself while you have not. It helps a lot when one tries to put oneself in the other fellow's shoes. That's why the first and perhaps one of the best detectives in history was an ex-con with a long record."

"Who was that?"

"Eugene Francoise Vidocq."

"I'll look him up some day," Norris promised. "If by then I'm not in the jug busily completing my education."

"You'll never look him up. He died long before you were born. All the same, I—"

He shut up as his mental searchlight made one of its periodic circlings and found something in the surrounding ocean of emanations. He was quiet while his mind listened.

It was coming again.

Gobble-gobble.

Failing to notice this sudden preoccupation, Norris prompted, "You were about to say?"

"Nothing of consequence. Let it pass."

Harper made a disparaging gesture, returned to his office and sat erect in his chair. He felt under the one arm to make sure the gun was readily available.

"Moira," he said quietly, "there's a packet for Schultz-Masters ready in the shop. It's urgent. I'd like you to take it to the post office at once. See that it goes by the midday mail. You need not hurry back. It'll do if you return after lunch."

"What about this correspondence, Mr. Harper?"

"You'll have all afternoon to cope with it. Put a move on and get rid of that consignment so that I'll have an answer ready if Schultz-Masters start bawling over the phone."

"Very well." She adjusted her hat on her head, picked up her handbag, went into the workshop and collected the package.

Going to the window, he watched her hurrying along the street in the direction opposite to that from which danger was coming. Well, that got her away from the scene of prospective trouble.

A couple of burly characters walked ten yards behind her rapidly clicking heels. They knew where she was going because the mike planted in the office had informed Norris or whoever happened to be listening-in. But they weren't going to let her out of their sight and hadn't done from the start of fixing the trap. It was just as well.

He did not open the window as he had done at the approach of Ambrose Baum. Leaving it fastened, he stood behind it surveying as much of the street as could be seen while stretching his receptive power to the utmost.

This time he was not going to make the mistake of transmitting a mental stab and getting the foe to flee with the knowledge so ardently sought. He was going to do no more than listen and thus leave the other mind blissfully unconscious of its open state. True, that meant he dare not stimulate desired information and had to rest content with whatever the hidden thinker saw fit to offer, regardless of whether said offerings made sense or nonsense.

Leaving the window he flopped into his chair, stared unseeingly at Moira's desk while he listened and waited. It was a unique and most curious experience despite previous brief encounters.

Judging by the chronically slow increase in amplitude of the distant impulses the oncoming entity was progressing at little more than a crawl; probably walking warily with frequent pauses for pretended examinations of shop windows. It was not hesitant in the manner of one fearful and on edge. On the contrary, it was cold-bloodedly aware of many dangers and trying to side-step any that became apparent.

The mind did not identify itself in human terms because at the moment it was not thinking in human terms.

Cogitatively, it was bilingual. The queer ganderlike *gobble-gobble* was an other-world soundtrack synchronized with other-world thought-forms. It was obedient to a habit born of countless centuries of possession by doing its thinking in the mental terms of its faraway hosts. Occupation of a completely human-type brain in no way handicapped this function. All brains utilize the data filed therein and this one was armed with knowledge of two worlds and at least two distinct species.

Even though directing his attention elsewhere, Harper was able to do some thinking of his own. What if this gradually nearing sneaker were none other than William Gould? How could he hope to walk in on Harper and get away with whatever he schemed to do?

It was hardly likely that his purpose was to kill, even at cost of his own life, because the foe would gain little enough from that. The prize they wanted and must secure at all costs was accurate knowledge of the means by which they could be identified. To slay the only one able to reveal this secret would leave them as perilously ignorant as before.

Their sole rational tactic was to capture and hold Harper for long enough to force the truth out of him. Once successfully grabbed, the technique of compulsion would be simple and effective. They'd take possession of him exactly as others had become possessed, after which they would find the wanted datum recorded in his mind, and it would be theirs, entirely theirs to use as they wished.

Nothing less than that would tell them what they had to combat and enable them to devise means of mastering any similar threats from any other source. Therefore the oncomer must be at least a scout tentatively testing local defenses or at most a would-be kidnaper hoping to pull the job singlehanded somehow, heaven alone knew how.

In the latter event there must be more to the present situation than was yet evident to the eyes. The enemy was far from stupid. No delegate of theirs would try to snatch Harper in these circumstances unless playing a part that offered at least a moderate chance of success.

The alien thought-stream had grown much stronger now and was replete with brief, unrecognizable scenes like glimpses of some nightmarish landscape. Harper removed attention from it for a moment while he scoured the area for minds like it. Perhaps there were a dozen or twenty converging by prearrangement upon his address, hoping to take him by sheer weight of numbers.

There were not. He failed to detect any others. Only this one was approaching and if any more of them were around they must be lurking beyond detectable range. If so, had they chosen their concealing distance by pure accident or had they started to make some very shrewd guesses?

Still he did not probe. Neither did he warn Norris as he was supposed to

do. He sat tight, determined for the time being to play things his own way. Regulation tactics had gained nothing but several corpses and a picture of a fuzzy ball. A little irregularity might prove more profitable. He did not bother to consider the risk involved or the possible cost to his own skin. His lack in this respect was more the measure of his impatience than his courage.

The other mind was now passing beneath his window but he did not try take a look that, if noticed, might create premature alarm. If it continued onward along the sidewalk, ignoring his front door, he was going to get out fast and nail it. But if it came in he was going to sit right there and meet it as man to mockman.

It turned in at the front door and immediately the thought-stream switched to human terms with all the brilliant clarity of the pane when it is suddenly adjusted after being mistily off-focus. There was a reason for that. The arrival had come into contact with a couple of agents on guard and immediately adapted itself to cope with a human situation. It was done with speed and polished perfection possible only to a life form that had never worn anything but fleshy masks because it had no face of its own. And in that pregnant moment Harper learned whom to expect. He read it in the minds of the agents even as they swapped a few words with the newcomer.

"Is the orang-outang here? Or has he gone out chasing a percentage?"

"He's warming his office chair."

"Mind if I bust in?"

"Go help yourself."

Harper smiled grimly. He picked up the agents' mental images as they let the enemy walk through. He changed attention to Norris, outside sitting on a bench in the workshop, almost saw through his eyes as idly he watched the other reach the door.

Then the gobbler entered and Harper said in the manner of one completely fooled, "Hello, Riley. What brings you here?"

Helping himself to the absent Moira's chair, Riley seated himself carefully, looked at Harper and all unwittingly gave him a piece of his mind.

"He is supposed to know us on sight in some mysterious way. Everything adds up to that fact. But he does not react in this case. That is strange. Something's wrong somewhere."

Vocally, Riley responded, "I'm keeping my finger on your pulse."

"Why?"

"There's a five thousand dollars reward in the bag for whoever finds Alderson's killer. Captain Ledsom hasn't forgotten it despite all the hullabaloo about three fellows who've done nobody knows what. I haven't forgotten it either. It's a lot of money."

"So you're hoping to sell me for that sum eventually?"

"No, I'm not. I don't believe you did it. But I think you know more than you've told. And I'm betting

that when all this ruckus is over you'll get busy on it."

"And then?"

"You may need my help. Or I may need yours. Between the two of us we might lay hands on that sack of gold."

"You're becoming mercenary in your old age, and sloppy to boot."

"What do you mean, sloppy?"

Carefully steering the conversation into mentally revealing channels, Harper said, "Fooling with Moira while I'm away."

"Bunk!"

"Cajoling her with a theater ticket."

That did it.

The responding flash of secret thought lasted no more than two or three seconds but was detailed enough to present the picture. Moira innocently enjoying the show in seat U. 17. William Gould apparently doing likewise in U. 18. Conversation between acts, a planned pickup and stroll home—with Moira finishing up no longer human.

Gould was young, attractive, had enough glamor to make the plot workable. Only a previous date had spoiled it. In any case, Moira's unshakable escort would have proved troublesome unless Gould escaped them by persuading her to invite him into her home. Perhaps that was what he had planned. The brief stream from Riley's brain lacked data on this point.

"I couldn't use it," said Riley. "What should I have done with it? Masticate it?"

"You could have given it to your wife."

Another picture came in response to that and confirmed what Harper had reluctantly taken for granted. Riley's wife was no longer a wife. She was a living colony of fuzzy balls that had the urge to spread but were utterly indifferent to the sex of the host. By implication, that added one more datum to knowledge of the foe, namely, that a person could not be confiscated by means of sexual union with one of the possessed. The virus could not or preferred not to penetrate by osmosis; it needed direct entry from the suffused bloodstream to the new bloodstream.

"She doesn't like to go by herself," said Riley. "What are you griping about, anyway? Why should you care where Moira goes or what she does of an evening?"

And then, *"There's something significant in this sudden concern for Moira. It smacks of deep suspicion. I don't see how he can be suspicious. Either he actually knows or he doesn't and by the looks of it he does not know."*

"According to the Feds I'm in some sort of danger," informed Harper. "If so, Moira shares it simply by working with me and being closest to me. I don't want her to suffer for my sake."

That had its calculated effect by lulling the other mind. It was much like playing a conversational version of chess, Harper thought. Move and countermove, deceitfulness and entrapment, prompt seizure of any ad-

vantage or opening likely to lead toward checkmate.

The next moment Riley emphasized the simile by making a dangerous move. "That may be so. But I am not Gould, McDonald or Langley. So why pick on me?"

There was nothing for it but to accept the challenge by making a bold advance.

Eying him steadily, Harper said, "I am not yawping about you personally. I am uneasy because I don't know who gave you that ticket."

The mental answer came at once: Gould.

"What does it matter?" Riley evaded. "How was he to know I wouldn't use it myself or that I'd offer it to Moira?"

"Oh, let's drop the subject," Harper suggested, with pretended weariness. "This chase after three men has got me jumpy enough to question the motives of my own mother."

Soothing lotion again. The opposing brain mopped it up solely because it was plausible.

"The sooner they're picked up the better I'll like it," continued Harper, offering fresh bait. "Take McDonald, for instance. He was around these parts quite recently. A smart copper like you ought to be able to find him."

Eureka! Out came the reaction as clearly as if written upon paper. Gould, McDonald, the Reeds and two others previously unknown were clustered together in Riley's own house, waiting, waiting for Harper to come along on the strength of whatever pretext Riley could think up.

So here was the real purpose of the visit. Riley had not yet got around to the enticement but would do so before leaving. Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly.

And in due course—it was hoped—Harper would drop in upon the Rileys while his bunch of shadows politely hung around outside. He would go in like a lamb to the slaughter and, after a while, emerge visibly no different. The shadowers would then escort him home and leave him to weird dreams of a far-off land where blind bugs serviced themselves from portions of their own dead and poison-spiked cacti tottered around on writhing roots and few agile creatures had souls to call their own.

The foreign intelligence now animating Riley proved itself sharp enough to bait the baiter. "What makes you think that I should succeed where a regiment of agents has failed?"

Harper had to react fast to that one. "Only because you're a local boy. They're out-of-towners. You've sources of information not available to them. You know the ropes, or ought to after all these years."

It was not quite good enough to halt the probe.

"Then why didn't they rely on the police instead of pushing themselves in by the dozens?"

"Ask me another," Harper said, shrugging. "Probably someone's de-

cided that the more men on the job, the better."

"It has bought them nothing so far, has it?" asked Riley, seemingly a little sarcastic.

But it was not sarcasm. It was temptation hidden under a cloak of mild acidity. It was an invitation to make mention of the Baums, to come out with a reply indicating how they'd been recognized for what they were.

The mind of Riley was working fast, driven on by the urgency of the slime that commanded it. But seek as he might he could not find a satisfactory explanation of the contrast between his own immunity and the speedy downfall of others of his type.

Temporarily, the only theory that fitted the circumstances was an unsatisfactory one, namely, that Harper's menacing ability functioned haphazardly or under certain specific conditions not present at this moment. However, no theory served to explain how it was done. On the contrary, the existing situation complicated the puzzle. What could be the nature of positive detection that operated only in spasms?

In the few seconds that Riley spent mulling these problems, Harper strove to cope satisfactorily with some of his own. By dexterous use of leading comments how much could he get out of Riley without giving himself away? How best to frame questions and remarks that would draw essential information from the other's mind? How to find out the means by which Riley himself had been taken over, how many others had become possessed, their names, their hiding-places, their plans and so forth?

"No," agreed Harper, thwarting him. "It hasn't gained them a cent so far."

Refusing to be stalled, Riley took it further. "Except that they've wiped out a couple of boys named Baum. We got a routine report from a patrolman about that. It wasn't an auto accident no matter what the official version says. It was the result of a fracas in which you were involved."

Harper offered no remark.

"Maybe it's no business of mine," Riley went on with just the right mixture of resentment and persuasiveness, "but if I knew how and why the Baums were finished it might give me a lead to this McDonald."

"Why?" asked Harper, looking straight at him. "Is there any connection?"

"You know there is. It's all part of the same crazy business."

"Who says so?"

The other's mind had a moment of confusion born of sudden need to cast doubt on what it knew to be true.

"Well, isn't it?"

"Maybe and maybe not," said Harper, keeping a perfectly expressionless face.

"Damn it, if you don't know what's going on, who does?"

That was another dexterously dug pitfall, a call to produce an evasive answer that might reveal plenty by its various implications.

Harper side-stepped the trap, feel-

ing cold down his back as he did it.

"All I can tell you is that they were known to have become pally with McDonald. Therefore, they were wanted for questioning. Immediately they were spotted they fled for dear life and one thing led to another." He paused, fought cunning with cunning by adding as a mystified afterthought. "It beats me completely. They weren't accused of a major crime so why did they flee?"

Turmoil grew strong in the opposing brain. It had been asked the very question to which it desired the answer, as a matter of life or death. The assumed holder of the secret was seeking the solution himself.

Why did they flee?

Why did they flee?

Round and round whirled the problem and persistently threw out the only answer, namely, that the Baums had run because they'd become known and had realized how they'd become known. Therefore the mode of identification must be self-revealing. The possessed could not be fingered without sensing the touch.

Yet now that it was put to actual test there was no recognition, no dramatic exposure, no feelable contact, no touch, nothing.

What's the answer to that?

"As a guess, divide this world's bipeds into types A and B. The former is vulnerable because identifiable by some method yet to be discovered. Joyce Whittingham was of that type. So were the Baums. So might others be. But for unknown reasons type B

is impervious to the power of Harper and any more who may share it. By sheer good fortune this body called Riley happens to be of that kind."

So the alien thought-stream ruminated while Harper listened, mentally thanking God that it had retained its pseudo-human role and not switched to trans-spatial double-talk.

It went on, *"If this notion should be correct then salvation lies around the corner. We must learn the critical factor that protects type B and how to distinguish one type from another. Henceforth we must take over only type B. The vulnerable ones can be dealt with afterward."*

We! The plural! Momentarily, in his concentration, Riley was thinking of himself as a mob!

Deep down inside himself Harper was sickened by this first-hand reminder of the ugly facts. The invader was a horde multi-millions strong. Each capture of a human body was victory for a complete army corps represented by a few drops of potent goo in which the individual warrior was—what?

A tiny sphere of hazy outline.

A fuzzy ball.

My brother's keeper!

Determined to make the most of his opportunity while it lasted, Harper went on, "Someone once remarked that the only difference between those in prison and those outside is that the latter have never been found out. Possibly the Baum brothers had something on their consciences and wrongly supposed it had been discovered. So they ran like jack rabbits."

"Could be," admitted Riley, while his thoughts said, *"It doesn't fit the facts. They had no cause for flight other than realization of betrayal. Harper knew them for what they were but refuses to admit it. That is at least consistent of him. He always did keep a tight mouth about his power."* A pause, followed by, *"Yet at the moment he lacks that power. Why? The reason must be found!"*

"Anyway, what's the use of gabbing?" Harper continued, craftily spurring the other on. "Talk gets us nowhere and I have work to do."

"You can't give me one useful hint concerning McDonald?"

"No. Go look for him yourself. You'll get plenty of kudos if you nail him. Besides, he may lead you to Gould who is wanted just as badly."

"Gould?" He stared across, thinking, *"Do they know or suspect that he is in this town?"*

"And his contacts," added Harper, panning for paydirt. "Every one of them for the past three months."

The result was disappointing. He got fleeting, fragmentary pictures of a score of people without any means of determining who they were or where they lived or what parts they were playing in this struggle for a world.

"When Gould and McDonald have been fastened down good and tight," he went on, "we may then have time to seek afresh for Alderson's killer and try for that five thousand you covet."

He was doing fine. The reference to Alderson brought the hoped-for reaction: a fragment of memory radiated with vividness. McDonald holding Joyce Whittingham while Gould sank a needle into her arm. Joyce struggling and screaming. A police cruiser suddenly halting right behind. Alderson jumping out and making for the Thunderbug. Langley pulling a gun and dropping him before he could intervene. So Langley had done it.

Hah! That brought up something else of considerable significance. The country's entire forces of law and order, Riley included, had been alerted to capture three men, not two. Yet Riley had shown no curiosity about Langley. He had asked about McDonald. He had accepted without question the reminder concerning Gould. Any normal individual would have brought up the subject of the third quarry—unless he knew that he was dead. Did Riley know that? If so, how had he learned it? How to find out?

Daringly, he rushed the issue. "As for Langley, nobody need worry about him any more."

Riley said nothing vocally but did utter a mental, *"Of course not. He's finished."*

"Who told you?" asked Harper.

"Told me what?"

"About Langley?"

"I don't know what you mean. Nobody has said anything to me concerning him."

"I've just mentioned that Langley is out of the running," Harper reminded. "You made no remark, showed no surprise. So I took it for granted that it was old news to you though I can't imagine how you got hold of it."

"You're wrong," contradicted Riley, hastening to cover up a minor blunder. "It's the first I've heard of it." The information failed to sink in.

He was too late. His mind had lagged seconds behind Harper's wits and his tongue had come last in the field. Despite intervening hundreds of miles, Riley had known of Langley's end the moment it occurred. He had sensed it as surely as one may gaze across a valley at night and see a distant light become suddenly extinguished.

It was a wholly alien faculty having nothing in common with any human sense. The possessed enjoyed a peculiar awareness of the existence of their own kind, could follow it blindly until they had gravitated together. By the same token, loss of awareness with respect to one particular focal point meant death far away over the horizon. Just the bare fact of death, without any details.

The same sense could detect a dreadful urgency radiated by another, the equivalent of a cry for help. It was strictly nontelepathic. A psi-factor. In effect, Riley could look afar, see the life-light emanating from one of his own kind, see it winking a summons for assistance, see it go dark. No more than that.

Perhaps it was the ultimate form of what Earth called the herd instinct.

An alien protective device evolved on another world where survival sometimes demanded a rapid gathering of the clans and the lone individual went under.

Therefore, elsewhere they must have a natural enemy, a constant antagonist not strong enough to keep them in total subjection, much less eliminate them, but sufficiently redoubtable to restrict their spread and help maintain a distant world's balance of competing life forms.

What could it be? Some strong-stomached animal that craved and consumed a potent virus with all the avidity of a cat lapping cream? A creature capable of devouring a possessed body without harm to itself? Or something smaller which came like warrior ants in hordes of its own and lived by ingesting armies of the vicious?

The datum was precious enough to be worth discovering if it could be gotten. But how to get it? How could he entice it from a hostile and wary mind without giving himself away? How can one question a Venusian concerning the fauna and flora of Venus while successfully managing to uphold the pretense of regarding him as a natural born native of Earth?

Another expedition might pick up the information some day—providing it did not succumb to the same fate as the first. But if urgent problems were not solved here and now there would never be another expedition, or not one that was truly human.

Knowledge of a deadly enemy's own especial foe was there, right there across the desk, buried within a mastered brain. If only it could be extracted, the scientists could search Earth for a local counterpart fully as capable of handling this alien menace. It was a glittering prize worth far more in the long run than capture of all this world's afflicted. It meant ability to deal with the root cause instead of fooling around with the symptoms.

Harper sought frantically for a method of making a highly dangerous move appear disarmingly innocent. He looked into Riley's questioning eyes which all along had seemed entirely normal and gave no hint of what was lurking behind.

Wetting his lips, he said, "Langley and some other fellow were trapped. They shot it out like madmen. It proved impossible to take them alive."

Riley raised an eyebrow in false surprise. "Everybody knew he was wanted but nobody's been told what for. Judging by that reaction the reason must have been mighty serious. So where's the sense in all the secrecy?"

"Don't ask me. I have no say in government policy." He made a gesture of bafflement. "You know how the top boys sometimes love to be mysterious."

The other grunted in disdain.

Now then, this was it, the critical play. It had to be done delicately, like handling dynamite. One slip and there'd be an explosion of wild action with Norris and the others

caught by surprise. Thank goodness Moira was out of it.

With a deceitfully reminiscent air, Harper went on, "It's possible that Langley really was cracked in the head. If so, I don't like it. Everyone has pet fears and I've got mine."

"Such as what?"

"When I was a small child I was afraid of big black dogs. Now I'm older I have a violent revulsion toward mental disease. I fear loonies." He pulled a face, nerved himself and made the move. "What scares *you* the most?"

By God, he got it! He got it as clearly and vividly as only a lifelong terror can be pictured. What's more, he felt sure that he recognized it, not by its form but by its brutal nature. And it was here, on Earth, waiting around and ready for use. He had to tighten his mouth to prevent himself from shouting aloud.

Standing up, Riley frowned at him and asked in taut tones, "What makes you ask me that?" And his mind followed on with, *"A while ago he said that talk was of no avail, that he was busy and had work to do. Yet he's been maintaining the conversation ever since. He has been prompting me repeatedly and I've had to keep avoiding his leads. Nevertheless he appears satisfied with answers that I've been careful not to give. How can that be?"*

The enemy mentality was searching with swiftly mounting alarm. Telepathy was completely outside its experience, nothing like it having been encountered in its native habitat. But when an astute mind fails to solve a problem on the basis of recorded data and steps right outside of experience to seek a solution within the imagination, anything is possible.

At any moment Riley was going to conceive the formerly inconceivable.

Then would come the eruption.

XII

Casually scratching under one arm in order to have fingers near the gun, Harper said, "I don't know why I asked you. I'm not in the least interested. If you feel touchy on the subject, you can attribute my question to mere yap. I've been doing too much of that considering the jobs waiting to be done. Go away and let me tend to my business."

He failed in his attempt to divert the thought-stream into another direction.

"He has a weapon there," it flowed on. *"I have seen him carrying it many a time. He has his hand on it and cannot conceal his tenseness. He would not be like that if he knew nothing. Therefore he knows something in spite of all my attempts to hide it."* A puzzled pause, then, *"I came in the role of an old friend. Yet he makes ready to deal with me for what I am."*

Grinning at him, Harper withdrew the hand, used it to scratch his head instead. It was a mistake.

"By the Great Black Rock of Karsim, he can hear my thoughts!"

The desk went over with a crash that shook the floor as Harper dived headlong across it and grabbed the hand which Riley was digging into a pocket. Something small, oval and metallic lay in the pocket but did not come out.

Voicing a loud oath in no known language, Riley used his free hand to try haul Harper from the pinioned one. He was a heavy, powerful man with a huge grip that had clamped itself unbreakably on many a struggling felon. Hauling with irresistible strength he was caught unaware when Harper went willingly with the pull and helped it farther. The unexpected coöperation sent him teetering on his heels, at which point Harper shoved with all his might.

Together they fell to the floor with Harper partly on top. Riley's eyes were aflame, his features crimson as he fought to beat off his opponent long enough to get at the object in his pocket. Pinning him down was like trying to fasten an enraged tiger to the earth.

A thick-knuckled fist landed squarely on Harper's mouth and brought a spurt of blood from split lips. The sight of it created a horrible eagerness in Riley's features. He redoubled his efforts to throw the other off, heaving tremendously and keeping his gaze on the blood.

Panting as he strove to maintain his position of vantage, Harper caught a knee-thrust in the stomach, whooshed expelled breath, spat crimson drops and hoarsed, "No you don't, you—!" He released his hold on Riley's right wrist, got a two-handed grip on his neck and dug thumbs into his windpipe.

At that point Norris jumped through the doorway, gun in hand, and bawled, "Break it up! Break it up, I tell you!"

Riley heaved with maniac force, tossed Harper off his middle, kicked at his head as he rolled aside and missed. He shot upright, glaring at Norris and showing complete disregard of the gun. He made a motion toward his pocket, came down flat before he could touch it as Harper twisted on the floor and snatched the feet from under him.

Clutching each other afresh, the two threshed around with bodies squirming and legs flailing right and left. A tall filing cabinet shuddered under their impact, rocked forward, toppled and flung a shower of business papers across the office. The telephone leaped from its rack, two bottles of ink and one of paste added themselves to the mess. The combatants continued to fight fiercely amid the litter.

Rausch and two more agents appeared just as Norris firmed his lips and stepped forward determined to end the battle. The four made a concerted rush that swept Harper aside and got Riley good and tight. They dragged him upright.

Sweating profusely, Riley stood in their grip, forced righteous indignation into his face and declaimed with plausible resentfulness, "The man's gone completely mad. He attacked

me without warning and for no reason at all. There must be something wrong with him."

It was said with such a natural air that Norris had a nervy moment of wondering whether Harper had gone bad right under his nose and despite all their precautions.

"Feel in his pocket and see what he's got," suggested Harper. Sitting on the edge of the upended desk, he dabbed his bleeding lips with a handkerchief.

Norris did that, produced a grenade, examined it. "Army model, same as Baum used." He gazed hard-eyed at Riley. "Funny sort of thing for a police officer to carry around, isn't it?"

"He's not a police officer any more," Harper put in. "And he isn't Riley either. Rush him down to the Biological Research Laboratory. They need him there at once."

These words created a sudden frenzy in the prisoner. His arms were held but his legs were not. He kicked Norris in the middle, tore loose, tried to snatch the grenade. Norris bent forward doubled with agony but held onto it. Riley pulled at him, gobbling and foaming, making strange whining noises and working his features almost out of recognition.

An agent slapped him. Riley rocked dazedly, let his hands hang. The agent slogged him again, a vicious crack devoid of mercy. Riley collapsed like an empty sack. He lay with eyes closed, lips shut and breathed with eerie bubbling sounds.

"I've no time for belly-kickers," said the agent.

Norris straightened himself painfully, his face white and strained. He held out the grenade. "Take it away some place where it can do no harm."

"Same applies to the owner," Harper reminded. "Tie him up so he can't choke himself with his own fingers and get him to the Bio Lab."

"Is he—?"

"Yes, he is. And it's my fault. He had entry to this office and it's cost him his soul."

"I thought you were supposed to be able to smell them coming," Norris complained. "What's the use of us guarding you for half a mile around if they can walk in like this and—"

"I knew he was coming."

"Then why didn't you tell us? I was listening-in to your conversation and thought it decidedly fishy. You were needling him for some reason or other. But seeing that you had sounded no alarm we—"

"Look," said Harper, firmly, "this is no time for explanations or post-mortems. Rush him to Dr. Leeming at the Bio Lab as fast as you can make it. And don't give him the slightest opportunity to finish himself on the way there. I'm giving you fair warning that if he can't escape he'll kill himself by any means to hand. He must be delivered alive and in one piece."

"All right."

Norris signed to the others. They lifted Riley who now had steel cuffs on wrists and ankles and was still

unconscious. They carried him out.

Mopping his lips again, Harper stared moodily at the wreckage of his office. He was not really seeing it, though. He was physically and spiritually shaken and striving to overcome it. Crazy circumstances had turned an old law topsy-turvy and made the reversal equally true: greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down a friend's life for himself.

Horrible, horrible!

Moira came in saying, "I left all my money behind, so I couldn't—" She halted, went wide-eyed, let go a gasp. "Why, Mr. Harper, what on earth has happened?"

"I had a fit of sneezing."

Dragging his desk upright and restoring his chair to its legs, he sat and continued to ruminate while Moira scrabbled for loose papers. Then suddenly he smacked a hand to his forehead and ejaculated, "I go dafter as I get older!"

He dashed out while Moira knelt in the middle of the floor and gaped after him.

On the sidewalk Norris and Rausch were standing with hands in pockets while watching two cruisers speed along the street.

Norris greeted him with, "He's gone. They'll hand him over to Leeming in no time." Then a mite doubtfully, "And I hope you know what you're doing. There'll be plenty of trouble if we've blundered in this case."

"You've not dealt with the half of it yet," informed Harper, hurriedly. "There's a gang of them hiding in his home. What's more, I've reason to think they knew of his capture the moment he was slapped to sleep. Ten to one it got them on the run forthwith. You'll have to move fast to nab them."

"We can do no more than our best," said Norris, unimpressed and making no move.

"McDonald's there and several others," Harper urged. He scowled impatiently at the other. "Well, are you going to take action or do I have to go myself?"

"Easy now," Norris advised. He gave a slow smile. "We know exactly where Riley lives. He's been followed time and again."

"What of it?"

"When we carted him out a raid on his house became the next logical step. Five cars with twenty men have gone there. They'll grab everyone they can lay hands on. Afterwards, and if necessary, we'll use you to tell us who is which."

"So you've been thinking ahead of me, eh?"

"It happens sometimes," assured Norris, smiling again. "You can't lead the field all the way. Nobody can do that no matter what his mental speed."

"Thanks for the reminder. Send a man round the garbage cans to get a few ashes, will you? I wish to put them upon my head while work proceeds."

He returned to the office. Moira had already succeeded in restoring

some semblance of order. She filed the last of the scattered papers in the cabinet, closed it with an emphatic slam, surveyed him much as a long-suffering mother would regard an irresponsible child. That did nothing for his ego, either.

"Thank you, Angel. Now go get your lunch."

He waited until she had departed, picked up the phone, made a long distance call to Leeming.

"A live one is on the way to you right now and, with luck, there'll be several more to come. Don't tell me what you propose to do to the first arrival. I don't want to know."

"Why not?" Leeming asked, exhibiting curiosity through the visi-screen. "It is somebody close to you?"

"Yes. A big, lumbering, good-natured cop I've known for years. I hate to think of you carving him up."

"He won't be carved. We've done all we need of that on dead bodies. Living victims will be used as test-subjects for likely vaccines."

"What's the chance of developing a satisfactory cure?" Harper asked.

"There's another problem far more important," Leeming gave back. "Namely, whether we can find one in adequate time. We can succeed and yet fail because success comes too late."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"I refuse to commit myself at this stage. We aren't the only ones on the job. In a crisis of this sort the government turns to anyone and everyone who can lend a hand, private laboratories included. Somebody else may strike lucky and come up with a solution while we're still seeking it. All we can do here is work like hell and pray."

"If producible, an effective vaccine should be innocuous, shouldn't it?" Harper pursued.

"What do you mean?"

"The cure shouldn't be little better than the disease?"

"What the devil are you getting at?"

Harper hesitated, continued carefully, "I'll tell you something. That virus cannot think by itself any more than you can drive a nonexistent car. But it can think when in possession of a brain. And I know one thing it thinks about. It is scared to death of meningococci."

"What?" yelled Leeming, thunderstruck.

"I'm giving you a genuine basic fact. That alien nightmare has a nightmare of its own. No living thing can be afflicted by it and have cerebro-spinal meningitis at one and the same time. Something has to go under and it's the virus that does the going."

"Where did you learn all this?"

"From a victim. The one they're taking down to you at this moment."

"How did you find out?"

"He told me without realizing it. He named his alien obsession and I'm giving you it for what it's worth."

Leeming breathed heavily, excitement showing in his eyes.

"It could be, too. It really could

be. Areas of local infection are identical. Brain and spinal column. You can see what that means—a fight for living space."

"Supposing you squirt someone full of meningococci," Harper went on, "and he becomes cured with respect to the foreign disease. What'll he be like with respect to the cure itself?"

"That's something we've yet to discover," said Leeming, grim and determined.

"Well, I've no choice but to leave it with you. All I ask is for you to remember that your first test-subject is my friend."

He cut off, racked the phone, sat twisting his finger and staring at them. After a while he held his face in his hands and murmured, "It had to be Riley and his wife. Poor devils!"

In the late afternoon Norris beckoned him out of Moira's hearing, said, "They got Mrs. Riley, Mrs. Reed and two men named Farley and Moore. We've discovered that the women are sisters. Farley and Moore were friends of the Reeds. Moore was a close business associate of the Baum brothers. You can see the link-up and how trouble has spread from one to another."

"Did they put up a fight?"

"You bet they did. When the boys got there the house was empty and the front door still swinging. The rats had run for it but hadn't time to escape from sight. Mrs. Riley, Farley and Moore were nabbed on the street half a mile away. They needed three men apiece to hold them."

"And what of the others?" Harper asked.

"Mrs. Reed was picked up in a store pretending to be one of the crowd. She reacted like a wildcat. Reed himself stepped off a roof rather than be taken. McDonald was trapped in a parking lot while trying to steal a car. He was armed. He shot it out to the finish."

"He is dead?"

"Yes. Same as Langley and for the same reason. It was impossible to take him alive."

"How about Gould?"

Norris rocked back. "What d'you mean, how about Gould?"

"He was there at Riley's house."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I'm positive."

Accepting that without argument, Norris affirmed, "There was no sign of him. But he'll be found." He mused a bit, went on, "We're now tracing all contacts of the entire bunch and pulling them in as fast as we find them. The total number may come to hundreds. Anyone known to have stood within a yard of any one of them is liable to be taken for questioning. You'd better hold yourself in readiness to look them over carefully as we line them up."

"All right."

"It may go on for weeks, perhaps months."

"I'll suffer it." Harper eyed him speculatively. "You say that Riley's

house was deserted when your men arrived?"

"Yes."

"Who tipped them to leave in a hurry?"

"Nobody," said Norris. "When Riley didn't return on time they took alarm and fled."

"It was more positive than that," Harper informed. "They were tipped."

"By whom?"

"By Riley himself. He couldn't help it. He lost consciousness and that was enough for them. They got out fast the moment one of your boys clouted Riley on the head. They *knew* he'd been caught."

"I don't see how," Norris protested.

"Never mind how. I'm telling you that each one of them knows when another has been put out of action."

"What of it, anyway?"

"At the Bio Lab they're holding an afflicted dog. I've a feeling that sooner or later that animal may be able to summon help. It's a guess and nothing more. How about persuading Jameson to put a guard on the place."

"It's already protected. You ought to know that. You've been there."

"The guard is a military one. It isn't prepared for the sort of trouble we're having here."

"You're doing the identification for us at this end," Norris. "Who'll do it for them down there?"

"Me."

"What, over such a distance?"

"I'm going there. I'm a constant center of interest to the foe no mat-

ter where I may be. That dog is a focal point for them. So is each and every live victim we hold. Get them all in one place and we thereby create a cumulative attraction that may prove irresistible. Desire for revenge, rescue and continued concealment should be more than enough to draw the enemy's full strength to the one spot. Their best bet lies in making a concerted effort. It would be about the only chance we'd ever get of settling them with a single blow."

"I'll put it to Jameson and ask him to consult General Conway," said Norris. "The plan is worth considering."

"While you're at it you can tell Jameson that I'm on my way no matter what is decided."

"You can't do that."

"I can. Try giving me contrary orders and see where it gets you." He grinned at Norris. "I'm a free individual and intend to remain one with or without the kind permission of Conway or any other character."

"But Rausch and I have to stay with you," Norris objected. "And we're supposed to work this trap. It's operating all right. Look at today's catch."

"The bait is transferring itself to a bigger and better rat-run," Harper gave back. "Please yourself whether you come along."

He tramped into the office, found his week-end case, checked its contents, said to Moira, "Hold the fort, rush out the products, make excuses for me and bank the profits. Papa's taking another trip."

Norris and Rausch piled into his car as he was about to start, and the former said, "We've got to hang onto your coat tails no matter what you do. Your plant remains under guard. But if someone cockeyed walks into it, there'll be nobody to give warning."

"Same applies at the Bio Lab which is now a more enticing target." Harper pulled out from the curb and took the center of the street. "And I cannot be in two places at once."

He drove fast with another burdened car following close behind. His mind reached out and felt around as he went through the town. This time, he decided, a faint threnody of alien thoughts would not be ignored. He was at the wheel and he'd go after it.

But it did not come. They cleared the town and roared into the country without being drawn into hectic pursuit of a lone masquerader among the multitude. That did not mean that Gould or any fellow conspirators had fled the place; only that if still there they were lurking out of receptive range.

The car swung into its fenced and patrolled destination an hour after darkness had fallen. Norris immediately put through a call to Jameson, briefed him on latest events. Sometime later Jameson called back.

"You're getting your way," Norris informed Harper. "Conway has ordered special measures to protect this place."

"Unless I've gravely miscalculated, we'll need 'em."

They did.

The attack came four days afterward by which time the delay had given some the secret belief that nothing would ever happen. It employed a technique characteristic of alien-controlled minds filled with two-world data and trying to combine the tactics of both. The plan represented a compromise between sneakiness and direct assault.

At midday a large, official-looking car slid up to the gates barring the main entrance. Its driver was attired as a sergeant of military police and its sole passenger was a gray-haired, autocratic man in the uniform of a four-star general. The sergeant showed the sentry an imposing pass, stamped, signed and ornamented with a large seal. The sentry scanned it slowly, making no attempt to open the gates. He smelled eucalyptus.

"Hurry up, mister!" urged the sergeant authoritatively while the general gazed forth with an air of stern reproof.

Though made nervous by the presence of high rank, the sentry took his time. He had been well-trained these last few days and understood that the gates were barred to God himself unless a bell in a nearby hut clanged permission to enter.

The bell did not sound. In the hut, at back of the fence, a watching agent pressed a stud. And in a building a quarter of a mile away a buzzer drew Harper's attention to the gate. He heard the whirr, ceased conversation with Rausch, listened, pressed another stud. A shrill peep sounded from the hut and an alarm siren started wailing over the main building.

Startled, the sentry dropped the pass, leveled his gun at the sergeant. Four agents leaped from the hut, weapons in hands. A dozen more appeared in the roadway behind the car.

Once more the possessed displayed their inhuman contempt for bullets and sudden death. Without slightest change of expression the sergeant let the car charge forward. The sentry fired two seconds before the bonnet struck his chest. The car hit the gate squarely in the middle and exploded.

The gate, the entire front of the hut, the car, its occupants, the sentry and six agents flew to pieces. Four more agents lay mauled and dead. Six groaned by the fence, injured but alive.

Two heavily loaded cars screamed along the road and rocked through the gap. The wounded agents fired into them as they passed, without visible result.

Neither vehicle got more than twenty yards beyond the wrecked gateway despite the lunatic speed with which they had arrived. The alarm had sounded too promptly, the preparations for it were too good, the drill too well-organized.

The leading car found its route blocked by an eighty-ton tank which lumbered forward spewing fire from three loopholes, riddling the target at the rate of two thousand bullets per minute. Shedding glass, metal splinters and blood, it slewed onto grass and overturned. Nothing stirred within it.

Its follower halted just inside the fence, disgorged eight men who spread fanwise and raced inward at an angle outside the arc of fire. Ignoring them, the tank busily wrecked their machine.

Something farther back gave a low, dull *whoomp-whoomp* and spurts of heavy vapor sprang from the ground one jump ahead of the invading eight. It did not halt them or give them to pause. They pelted headlong through the curtain of mist, made another twenty yards, collapsed one by one.

A pair of them dropped clutching grenades in hands that lost grip as vapor compelled their minds to swirl into unconsciousness. Released plungers walloped detonators, there came two brief eruptions of turf, dirt and flesh.

Masked men picked up the remaining six as the tank crunched forward on noisy caterpillars and filled the torn gateway. Shots and shouts sounded far away at the other side of the area where six men had picked off two patrolling guards, climbed the fence and been trapped. It was a foolhardy tactic depending for success on sufficient diversion at the front gate.

Five minutes after the battle had ended a convoy of armored cars toured the countryside for forty miles around, Harper being a passenger in the first one. It was two hours before he picked up the only trace.

"There!" he said, pointing to an abandoned farmhouse.

They kept him out of reach while they made the attack. It produced three corpses and two badly wounded captives.

No more were findable before dawn when the search became complete. Harper arrived back red-eyed, tousel-haired and fed up.

"Gould was in that first car," Norris informed.

"Dead?"

"All of them, nine in number. That tank made a job of it." He shrugged, added, "Now we've the task of discovering the identities of all those involved, including those whose bodies got scattered around. After that, we must trace all their contacts and bring them in for clearance by you. I can see this lasting my lifetime."

Leeming entered the room. He was pale and drawn from lack of sleep. He said to Harper, "I'd like you to come take a look."

Leading the other through a series of corridors in which an armed guard stood at every corner, he reached a row of strongly barred cells, pointed into one.

"What can you tell me?" he asked in strained and anxious tones.

Harper looked. Inside, clad only in socks and pants, Riley sat aimlessly on the edge of a bed. His eyes were lackluster but his beefy face held an expression of childish amusement.

"Well?" pressed Leeming. "Is the virus conquered?"

"Yes." He voiced it without triumph and the other heard it without joy.

"You can say positively that it is no longer active within his system?"

"Yes."

Leeming hesitated, spoke solemnly. "I gave him what you said he feared the most. We had to try it. We just can't wait for a vaccine. First things come first—and humanity comes before the individual. So I called in Gottlieb and Mathers of the Bacteriological Warfare Station and we tried it."

Harper made no remark.

"It has proved a cure," Leeming went on. "Physically there are no ill effects. He shows no symptoms of meningitis from that viewpoint. Nevertheless, he has paid a price. I know it but I want your confirmation." He looked at Harper as if hoping for the one chance in a thousand that he would be pronounced wrong. "What is the price?"

"Insanity," said Harper.

"I hate to hear you say it." Leeming stood silently a while and tasted the bitter ashes of victory, then said with faint hope, "There's another one in the next cell. A fellow named Moore."

Harper went there, gazed in and declared, "The same." Then something inside him gave way and he growled, "They're better off dead. Do you hear me? They have minds like porridge, all messed up to hell, and they're better off dead."

"They are dead," informed Leeming, on the defense. "They were dead when first brought to me. I cannot restore a human spirit already lost, I cannot recall an expelled soul. Science has its limits. When it can get that far it will have ceased to be science. The best we can manage is to defend the community by destroying a source of infection. And that we have achieved."

"I know, I know. Don't think I'm blaming you or anyone else." He patted Leeming's shoulder by way of comfort. "And don't reproach yourself, either. It's my illogical habit to regret the dirtier facts of life even when they're unalterable."

"Everything that can be done will be done," assured Leeming, perking up slightly. "We're treating all of them in the same way because at least it's swift and sure. After that, some of the country's best mental specialists will take them over. That's right out of my field but I wouldn't say they're beyond help. Maybe others can restore them to normality."

"Never," asserted Harper. "A battlefield is a torn and sterile area pockmocked with craters, littered with rubble and stinking of decomposition. That's what their brains are like."

He walked away, twitching fingers as he went. The war for a world had been won because, as usual, the few had sacrificed themselves for the many. The few who were humanity's best. Always it had been so, always would be.

It was two years before the last echoes of combat died away. That was when they called upon him to inspect and pass judgment on a small group of frightened people finally

run down in faraway places. These were the only remaining contacts with any of the possessed. None proved subject to other-world mastery.

During that long time he had looked over more than eight thousand suspects, many of them shipped back from overseas by coöperation of warned and wary governments. In the first week he had discovered four men who were not men, and in the second week one woman who was not a woman. After that there had been no more. The world had cleared itself of mental sepsis.

The missing space vessel had been discovered lying in a hundred fathoms beyond Puget Sound and salvage outfits were still toiling to raise it piecemeal. Scientists were busily devising positive means of protection for a second Venusian expedition and seeking an effective weapon with which to free the Wends, an agile, intelligent, lemurlike creature that could speak.

"Var silvin, Wend?"

The Lunar Development Company had won its suit and the powers-that-be had received a legalistic rap across the knuckles. A reward of five thousand dollars had been used to start a fund for the dependents of spacemen and already the total sum had passed the million mark. From Harper's viewpoint, these were by far the two most pleasing items to date.

But no heavy hand bashed open his door, nobody brushed his papers aside to make seating-room on his desk, nobody claimed some of his time for an exchange of insults. Riley was away in a big house in the country, helping with the gardening, doing petty chores, smiling at chirping sparrows, being gently led to his bedroom when sleepy time came. Like all the others, a little child. He would never be any different. Never, never, never.

So far as Harper personally was concerned, the after-effects of the fracas would remain with him all his life. Not only in memory but also in immediate circumstances.

For instance, business had grown as he expanded into ancillary products. Forty men now worked in the plant. One of them, Weiss, was not only a highly-skilled instrument maker but also a government stooge. Conway's eye. He could blind it by firing the man—only to be watched by another. There was no way of getting rid of constant observation.

His mail was watched. There were many times when he suspected a tap on his telephone line. Whenever he made a swift move by car or plane he was followed. Norris or Rausch called once a month for an idle chat designed to remind him that the memory of authority is long and unforgiving.

What they were after was continued proof of his genuine uniqueness to the end of his days or, alternatively, evidence that birds of a feather were beginning to flock together. One Harper was enough. Two would be dangerous. Ten would represent a major crisis.

Despite rapidly increasing prosper-

ity he was irritable, frustrated and desperately lonely. He experienced all the soul-searing solitude of a rare animal in the zoo constantly stared at by numberless curious eyes. Sometimes he felt that they'd willingly shoot him and stuff him but for the remote possibility of a recurrence of past events. They might need him again.

Yes, they feared him but feared other things more.

There was no escape from the situation other than that of burying himself in business, of concentrating on one thing to the exclusion of everything else. That he had done to the best of his ability. So the plant had grown and micromanipulators become only a minor part of his output. He was heading for the role of a wealthy man locked in a world-wide jail.

Another thirty months crawled by, making four and a half years in all. Then the miracle happened. It was unbelievable. But it was true.

He was about to take his car from a parking lot when he caught a brief flicker of alien thought. It struck him like a physical blow. The direction and range were sensed automatically: from the south, about four miles away. A distance far beyond his normal receptivity.

With sweating hand on the car's door he stood and listened again, seeking it directively. There it came. It was not alien. It had only seemed to be so because new and strange, like nothing previously encountered. It had power and clarity as different from other thought-streams as champagne differs from water.

He probed at it and immediately it came back with shock equal to his own. Getting into his car, he sat there shakily. His mind fizzed with excitement and there were butterflies in his stomach while he remained staring through the windshield and apparently daydreaming. Finally, he drove to a large restaurant, ordered dinner.

She had a table to herself far away at the opposite end of the room. A strawberry blonde, small, plump, in her middle thirties. Her face was pleasantly freckled and she had a tip-tilted nose. At no time did she glance his way. Neither did he pay any attention to her when he departed.

After that they met frequently without ever coming near each other or exchanging one vocal word. Sometimes he ate in one place while she sipped coffee in another half a mile away. Other times he mused absently in the office while she became thoughtful in a distant store. They took in the same show, he in one part of the theater and she in another, and neither saw much of the performance.

They were waiting, waiting for circumstances to change with enough naturalness and inevitability to fool the watchers. The opportunity was coming, they both knew that. Moira was wearing a diamond ring.

In due course Moira departed with congratulations and a wedding gift.

Twenty girls answered the call for her successor. Harper interviewed them all, according the same courtesy, putting the same questions, displaying no visible favoritism one way or the other.

He chose Frances, a strawberry blonde with plump figure and pert nose.

Ten days later Norris arrived on his periodic visit, looked over the newcomer, favored her with a pleasant smile, mentally defined her as nice and nothing more. He started the chitchat while Harper listened and gazed dreamily at a point behind the other's back.

"For the fiftieth time, will you marry me?"

"For the fiftieth time, yes. But you must be patient. We'll fall into it gradually."

"So this fellow showed the manager a bunch of documents certifying him to be a bank examiner from head office," droned Norris. "The manager fell for it and—" He paused, added in louder tones, "Hey! Are you paying attention?"

"Of course. Carry on. I can hardly wait for the climax."

"I don't want to be patient. I don't want to be gradual. I want to fall into it fast."

"You know better than that. We must be careful."

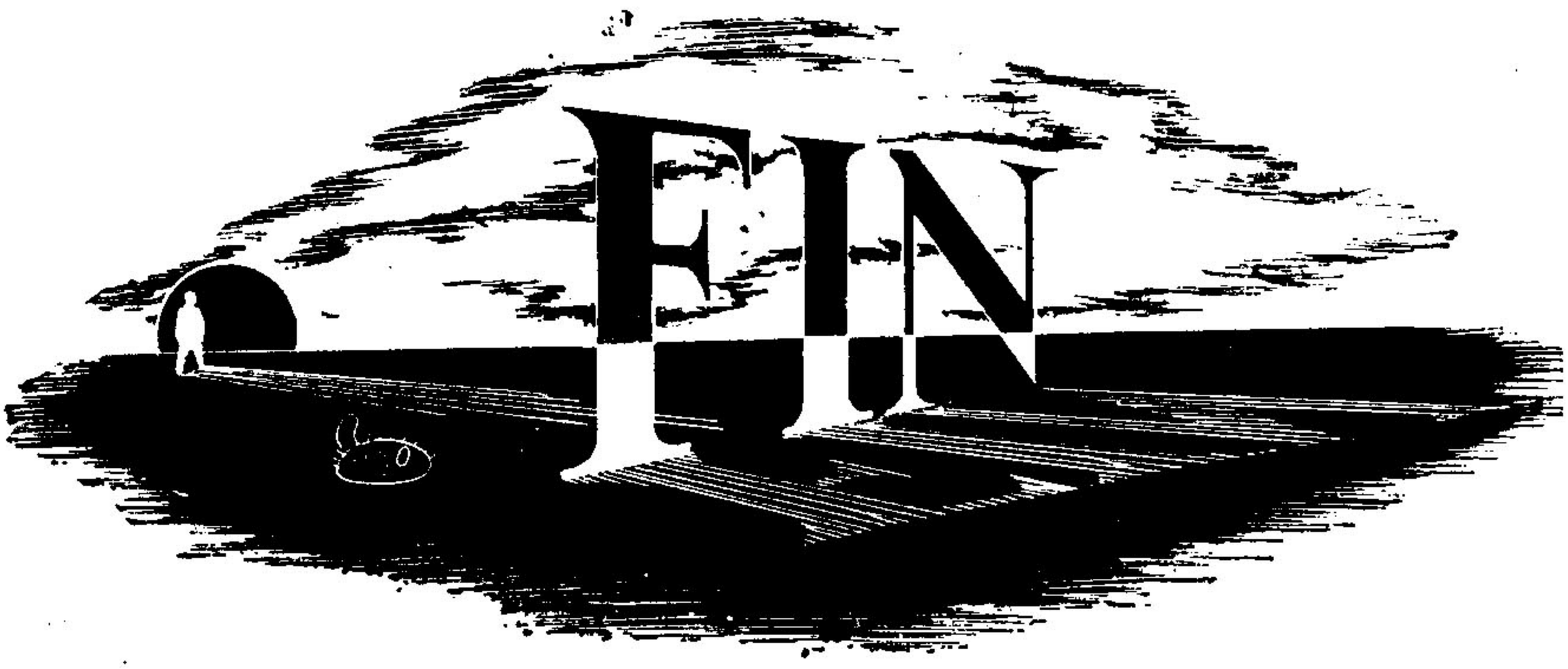
"I want children just like us."

"Wait!"

She slipped paper into her typewriter, adjusted it pink-faced and smiling.

"That was his downfall," finished Norris, completely innocent of the byplay. "So he tied himself up for life."

"Don't we all?" said Harper, hiding his bliss.



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BY P. SCHUYLER MILLER

TAKE MY WORD FOR IT

In the long run, most of what we know about the world is based on somebody's say-so. In physics and chemistry, the bald statement that thus-and-such procedure produced certain phenomena can usually be checked by doubting Thomases—and if the original paper wasn't clear enough to permit a repeat, that's one demerit against it. Biology often comes a bit closer to the borderline: the flora and fauna don't always behave today as they did yesterday. Where did Purple Martins live, for instance, before people began building martin tenements for them? Were they tree swallows or bank swallows? And why are those deep-woods recluses, Wood Thrushes, now moving into town and joining the Robins on lawns?

The purely observational sciences, such as astronomy and—I admit shamefacedly—archeology, are strictly a matter of hearsay. The astronomer, if he's lucky, can get a photograph or find a fellow observer who saw the same thing. Since he's plagued by the normal number of observational aberrations, it will be someone who saw *almost* the same thing. The archaeologist, even if he

is ultra-painstaking in the sand-scraping Midwestern manner, realizes that his evidence is no better than his skill at seeing what is in the ground. He, or a colleague, may find an *analogue* where similar people lived a similar life at about the same time, but once a site is dug, it's gone.

In all such matters there are all sorts of gradations in the reliability of an observer's report of what he saw. It may conceivably be (1) literally and completely true—but even so, he may have missed something. It is very likely to be (2) consciously or unconsciously colored by what the observer expected or wanted to see. Every psychology class in the country has demonstrated the unreliability of eye-witness evidence. It may, as in the case of many reputable scientists' judgment of the faked Piltdown relics, be (3) an honest reaction to some second party's hoax or forgery. And, of course, it may be (4) the witness' own hoax, like Locke's classic "Moon Hoax."

Presumably all the Flying Saucer reports fit into one or another of these categories. Conservative science, represented best by Donald H. Menzel's "Flying Saucers," assumes that all the reports are of natural objects and phenomena which may or may not be described literally—there are hundreds of the type: "I saw a Flying Saucer"—and may or may not be distorted by the observer's own feelings about the matter. I know that I have been conscious of seeing more of the atmospheric phenomena that Menzel describes, since I read his book, than in the forty years before.

But what do you do when George Adamski ("Flying Saucers Have Landed") and Truman Bethurum ("Aboard a Flying Saucer") and now an English writer and amateur astronomer and ornithologist, Cedric Allingham ("Flying Saucers From Mars": British Book Centre, New York; 153 pp.; ill; $2.75) say: "I saw a Flying Saucer land. I saw someone get out. I communicated with him and this is what he told me."

Adamski, you'll remember, says that he saw and photographed his saucer in California on December 13, 1952. They were extremely clear pictures as Saucer photos go, though the clear ones don't show enough to give a clue to the size. They show what is now establishing itself as the orthodox Flying Saucer model (*Saturday Review* makes it official in a cartoon in the June 4th issue): something like a turned metal streetlight reflector with sets of three holes in the central dome, a similarly dish-shaped plastron closing the bottom, and three "landing gear" like half rubber balls on the bottom. Allingham has now photographed precisely this same artifact—there's certainly nothing natural about it—except that his has a spike on top instead of Adamski's bulb-top. There's a reason: the blond man in a ski suit who talked to Adamski in '52, and drew him some weird symbols, claimed to be from Venus, while the six-footer who visited Scotland on February 18, 1954—and allowed Allingham to

take a very, very fuzzy picture of him going thataway—was from Mars.

Both men have witnesses who say they watched the encounter from a distance. They can point to other Saucer photos from England, Brazil and elsewhere which seem to show Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO's) of the same general construction. There is no possibility of a mistake: or, rather, just one. They *may* have seen an ordinary Earthling jokester in a highly unusual aircraft, who pretended to be a Martian or Venusian. Otherwise, they either met and talked with extra-terrestrials, or they are lying and faking their photos to boot.

I am not the one to tell you which, though I admit I am a skeptic of the "I wanna see one myself" school. I can say this: as a book, Allingham's "Flying Saucers From Mars" is by a long, long way the best written, sanest, most unimpassioned and convincing that I have seen to date, not excluding Dr. Menzel's. (I think the publisher has done the author a disservice by mixing up the pictures opposite pages 65 and 96). It has none of the occultism that is making other Saucer treatises ridiculous. It's the kind of story that could convince a jury.

I can't say as much for its companion volume, Leonard G. Cramp's "Space, Gravity and The Flying Saucer" (British Book Centre, 182 pp.; ill; $3.00), which purports to be a scientific explanation of what makes the Saucers fly. There are some good, clear drawings of what a Saucer of the Adamski-Allingham model looks like—including guesses at the interior—plus a confused and rambling tangle of words which seem to add up to the same conclusion that Desmond Leslie, British occultist and co-author of the Adamski book, stated there: UFO's are propelled by some sort of anti-gravitational force, generated and controlled mentally . . . in other words, what the spiritualists have long called levitation. Mr. Cramp shows a photo of someone with a good-sized table floating level with his midriff, just to show it can be done without mechanical gimmicks.

I am sorry to say that in the other two of 1955's Saucer books to date —early June—the occultists take over. From Harold T. Wilkins we have "Flying Saucers on the Attack" (Citadel Press, New York, 329 pp.; ill; $3.50) whose thesis is that there are UFO's of many different kinds, from some that look like monstrous animals to the ordinary kind, that they have been around for a long time—granted: Menzel documented that—and that some of them are actively hostile to us and have been doing damage by killing and kidnaping people and using disintegration rays. This is very dull reading in itself, and it is not greatly improved as evidence pro or con by Mr. Wilkins' willingness—as we saw some time ago in his book on South America—to accept second or third hand accounts—he quotes press clippings of Bethurum's story of the Saucer

from Clarion, the world behind the Moon, instead of using the book—and his, or the editor's, or somebody's habit of paraphrasing: alleged American quotations appear in British spelling ("colour," "aluminium") and phraseology.

In passing, he makes some rather remarkable scientific statements and judgments which lead me to question his ability to evaluate such things. There's the report that a "mother ship" was *photographed* at Lausanne in 1762 and a print filed with the French Academy of Science —his discovery of a photographer, so long before Niepce and Daguerre, would really be scientific news if true! He gives the constituents of a a "very remarkable alloy" showered from a UFO over Maury Island, State of Washington—without realizing that these are the metals reported in normal spectrographic assays. (An iron nail made at the Seventeenth Century Saugus Iron Works in Massachusetts shows the same analysis plus arsenic, barium, molybdenum, vanadium and tungsten, though lacking the Saucer-metal's calcium, strontium and cadmium.) He further protests that he can't understand how astronomers can say the Moon rotates on its axis, just because it presents the same face to the Earth at all times, and advances, apparently as his own suggestion, the possibility that heat may travel through space as electromagnetic radiation.

The same approach, right down to the *Marie Celeste* and rains of frogs, flesh and fishes—cosmic garbage—is taken by one M. K. Jessup in "The Case for the UFO" (Citadel Press; 239 pp.; $3.50). According to his publishers Mr. or Dr. Jessup is a noted explorer and instructor in astronomy and mathematics at the University of Michigan and Drake University. (He hasn't filed a biography with the new physical science volume of "American Men of Science"). He is a follower of Wilkins and Churchward who believes that a great civilization existed on Earth two or three hundred thousand years ago—Churchward's date for his "Naacal" tablets, which no one else has ever seen—and that these ancients created the prodigious monuments of old by using the same occult force of levitation which their heirs and descendants are using to propel their Flying Saucers. That Mr. Jessup is still singing the old, old occultist song of the terrific and mysterious antiquity of places like Baalbek—"there has never been found a single vestige of information intimating or showing when, or by what people, they were created"—the remarkable First Century A.D. Romano-Syrian ruins near Beirut, or the Tiahuanaco empire of Peru and Bolivia—"submerged and was raised from under the sea at the time of the formation of the Andes"—dated by good stratigraphy and radiocarbon evidence to 1000-1300 A.D., doesn't add much weight to his arguments in my book. (Two crosses "found in an ancient grave in the state of Georgia" are perhaps "dropped from spaceships":

they are ordinary Eighteenth Century types, well known to archaeologists.) His saucers originate at the Earth-Moon-Sun gravitational neutral."

But if you accept these reports of Saucer people because people say they saw them, you're also going to have to accept time travel, because in 1901 two English schoolmistresses, Miss C. A. E. Moberly and Miss E. F. Jourdain, visited Marie Antoinette's favorite refuge in the Petite Trianon gardens and talked with people, saw buildings, and walked along paths that hadn't existed there for over a century. A new edition of their story, titled simply "An Adventure," is just out from Coward-McCann (127 pp.; ill; $3.50) with an introduction by Dr. Joan Evans, a friend of the two ladies. At first the two Englishwomen supposed that they had merely met some strangely dressed people; then they began to compare notes with friends, and wound up delving through the payrolls of the Trianon —showing what gardeners worked at what jobs on what days—journals of the time, and all sorts of other documents to identify the people of their adventure.

Or if they didn't actually walk along the lost paths of the Trianon in 1789, you may prefer the ladies' own suggestion that they somehow "tuned in" on Marie Antoinette's memories of that day as she sat waiting for the mob to break through the token guard and tear her to pieces. But then whom did the messenger accost in his Breton French, and what strangers were warned away from the queen's private chapel as she sat sketching in the garden?

It would apparently have been much harder for Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain to fake their story in such minute detail than for the Saucer witnesses to concoct theirs, photographs and all. If we accept one, how can we reject the other? You take your Saucer pilots from behind the Moon; I'm for jaunts through time.

RE-BIRTH, by John Wyndham. Ballantine Books, New York. 1955. 187 pp. $2.00; paper 35¢.

If Arthur C. Clarke is at the moment Britain's ranking practitioner of science fiction, John Wyndham is running him a close second and improving fast. In "Re-Birth," quite without straining for novelty, he has made the Mutant theme believable in a way that "Odd John," "Slan," and the stories of the Baldies never quite were.

We are taken to a world after the final war, when most of the Earth has been blasted to radioactive slag, the climate has been jolted into something like the deepest of the interglacial periods, and survivors of mankind are building a new civilization in what were once uninhabited fringe areas, such as Labrador. They have the Bible with its repeated warnings of racial penance; they have

a vague memory of the Tribulation, and a hunger to be like the Old People who lived before it; they have a horror of the erratic Deviations, the Offenses and Blasphemies, which still crop out in man, beast and plants. They are brought up from babyhood on the Definition of Man from Nicholson's "Repentances," and, in a religious community like the one where young David Strorm is brought up, they follow it to the letter . . . so that when a child's wet footprint on the rock shows six toes, that child must be de-sexed and thrown out into the Fringes to make shift with the other monsters.

David's deviation is not the kind that his father or the local Inspector can see: he shares his thoughts with his cousin Rosalind and a secret fellowship of other boys and girls like himself. Then a little sister is born whose mental whisper is like their loudest shout, and the day comes when they are hunted for their lives . . . for surely Deviations that cannot be seen must be evil above all evil.

In its quiet way, I think you'll agree that this is one of the best of the Ballantine originals.

AN INDEX TO UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWN WORLDS, by Stuart S. Hoffman. Sirius Press, Box 13, Black Earth, Wisconsin. 1955. 34 pp. $1.00.

Here's another "must" for the collector of that grandest of the lost magazines, Street & Smith's *Unknown* (and *Unknown Worlds*). As Robert Bloch says in his introduction, "the magazine was a changeling." Although the magazine was a wartime casualty, the school of mature, intelligent fantasy which it championed has managed to survive. Now Stuart Hoffman has done us all a service with his nicely printed, spiral bound "Index," available from him for $1.00 American.

He gives you, first, an author index to everything in the magazine; then a more-than-title index which details the locale and principal characters of every story. Finally there is a directory of these characters themselves, with the stories in which they appeared. It's a labor of love, and the right size to bind into the last volume of your own collection of *Unknown*. Mr. Hoffman's colophon for Sirius Press is "At the Sign of the Howling Dog Star." Let's hope he has other things to howl about, as essential to our welfare as this.

BEYOND EDEN, by David Duncan. Ballantine Books, New York. 1955. 169 pp. $2.00; paper 35¢

Here is one of the best books Ballantine has given us, several notches beyond Duncan's "Dark Dominion," which I found pretty unconvincing. It may be that, as an ignoramus in biology, I was taken

in by "science" that is as phony as that crazy "element" in the previous book, but I don't think so. This has everything the other lacked.

The plot is reminiscent of one of John Taine's best scientific puzzles, unfolded phenomenon by phenomenon, clue by clue. The writing and characterization are considerably better than anything the old master has done, even in "Iron Star."

Henry Gallatin, when we meet him, is hard at work on a project to distill sea water in an atomic boiler, reclaiming the dissolved salts chemically first, then pumping the water over the mountains to reclaim the arid southwest. He has been hounded out of an atomic project by a venomous but sincere senator, after an error of his led to the death of an entire community, including his own wife. And now something strange is beginning to happen on the Neptune project—plants flourishing inexplicably, some men seeming to thrive on the water they drink while others sicken or go mad. Gallatin, Madeline Angus, his new assistant who has been first to note the strangeness of the "Living Water," and a small laboratory group are at work on the puzzle when Senator Bannerman descends on them with a committee to learn what kind of plot they are hatching. Then one of the committee, and their strongest supporter, drinks a glass of the water and falls dead . . .

From there on it is a race between Bannerman's campaign to jail them all, Gallatin and Madeline's efforts to find out in the laboratory what is happening, and the swift spread of the effects of the Living Water. There's suspense, spectacle, mystery, and believable people.

In short, I hope now—as I didn't especially after "Dark Dominion"—that David Duncan keeps on giving us better and better books like this. It should, I feel, rank with the best of '55.

STAR BRIDGE, by Jack Williamson and James E. Gunn. Gnome Press, New York. 1955. 221 pp. $3.00

Here is a grand, old-fashioned razzle-dazzle yarn of bloodshed and intrigue among the rulers of a galactic empire, that carries us right back to the days of Jack Williamson's "Cometeers" series. (And, to answer a question I asked some time ago, the term "android" first seems to have been used for flesh-and-blood robots in that story, though Edmond Hamilton probably "set" it in the language in his "Captain Future" tales.) In fact, at times that oddest of birds, Lily, sounds suspiciously like old Giles Habibula.

This isn't the serious social-problem novel that Williamson gave us in "The Humanoids," nor, I suppose, is it as well done. It is unabashed action-adventure, from the moment we pick up the assassin, Alan Horn, struggling across the desert with the hell-hounds of the Golden Folk on his track, until he bursts out of the

unbreakable prison-asteroid of the toppling Empire of Eron at the head of a band of thugs, to do bloody battle for the future of free choice in the galaxy. There's a nice concept in the net of extra-spatial tubes which ties Eron to its subject worlds and puts all Space within three hours of the control room on the gray planet. There are black villains and a beautiful girl. And there's the strangely ubiquitous Mr. Oliver Wu, fifteen hundred years old, with his highly intelligent and gifted parrot who isn't a parrot . . .

It all adds up to one of the best stories Gnome has given us. Even though it probably won't be on any "best" lists, it's fun to read.

THE LONG WAY BACK, by Margot Bennett. Coward-McCann, Inc., New York. 1955. 248 pp. $3.50.

Here is an importation from England (the author is actually a Scot transplanted to Australia) which is just about as stereotype for a kind of science fiction which the British seem to like and handle very well —as Miss Bennett has done, though she sets no new records for the form.

Centuries and perhaps millennia after a worldwide atomic cataclysm, a nucleus of civilization in South Africa has dragged itself up out of barbarism, and a rival society in the Americas—which apparently were overwhelmed by Red China—has done the same. The past is a mixture of myth and conjecture; there is no real history. And the South African society is a most unpleasant machine-run dictatorship of the unimaginative.

Our hero, Grame, is that unheard-of creature, a mechanic who has educated himself in defiance of the grading machine and who wants to be a physicist. Instead, he finds himself an anthropologist in an oddly assorted expedition on its way to investigate the remnants of England. Landing, they are set upon by a nightmare pack of mutant dogs and the survivors fight their way through the forests of rapacious animals and plants in search of the mythical Golden City. Instead they come upon a jungle theocracy of Britons, every bit as crippled by their legends of the past as Grame's own kind but without the blessings of African technology. At once it is Science vs. Religion, with bright-eyed pragmatism represented by Grame and their British befriender, Brown.

Grame does emerge as more than a cardboard figure, and so to a degree does Brown. The rest are types with which we are all familiar, even to the Wicked High Priest of Thai, though he is not really the stand-in for Evil of the more primitive yarns, but an individual who has a good thing and means to keep it for himself.

Smoothly done stories of this kind will probably win more converts to science fiction than the more developed stuff we're used to.

UNDER THE TRIPLE SUNS, by Stanton A. Coblentz, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa. 1955. 224 pp. $3.00.

I remember Stanton Coblentz's "Sunken World" and "After 12,000 Years" as monuments along the course of the old *Amazing Stories* (my Day *Index* pegs them in the *Quarterly* for Summer 1928 and Spring 1929, respectively). The same index shows that Coblentz was one of the most prolific writers of the time, and this new book, never before published, has a kind of flavor of those days about it.

Two men and a woman, after years in suspended animation, crash on a planet with three weird suns. They are first taken in by a scaled beelike folk, the Lil-bro; then in hunting for more stimulating company they are enslaved by the spiderlike monsters, the Ugwugs. Naturally, in due course, they find it necessary to champion the bee-bird Lil-bro against the loathsome Ugwugs (ugh!). But during lulls in the action, Coblentz has the opportunity to indulge in his old standby—rather heavy-handed satire, in which we are pretty well bludgeoned into seeing ourselves mirrored in some of the more outlandish aspects of Ugwug society. There's the thoroughly developed concept of the social climber who quite literally rises in society on the corpses of his rivals. There are sly asides such as the remark of one of the panel of judges: "I have never believed in treating foreigners like rational beings." There is much more. Swift set the style, and many another has emulated it, but I think we like our satire subtler and more in the projected vein of "The Space Merchants" nowadays.

SCIENCE FICTION TERROR TALES, edited by Groff Conklin. Gnome Press, New York. 1955. 262 pp. $3.50; Pocket Books, 25¢.

Here is the latest of Groff Conklin's uniformly excellent selections of good science-fiction shorts, with which I have only one quarrel: no terror. Of the fifteen stories in the book, my hackles bristled at only a few: perhaps two-thirds of Ray Bradbury's "Punishment Without Crime," Richard Matheson's "Through Channels," Peter Phillips' "Lost Memory" and maybe Chad Oliver's "Let Me Live in a House." But all are top-notch s-f, stimulating and often thought-provoking, both in the science-puzzle sense (Fredric Brown's "Arena" from this magazine) and in the sense of novel gimmicks (Murray Leinster's "Pipeline to Pluto"). The element of terror is there for the people of the stories, but—and it may be me—it doesn't transfer to the reader.

Originally from these pages, in addition to "Arena," are Theodore Sturgeon's "Memorial," Alan Nourse's "Nightmare Brother" (one of the best in the book), Leinster's "Pipeline to Pluto," and Robert Heinlein's classic "They" from *Un-*

known. Others not yet mentioned include Robert Sheckley's "The Leech" (which eats at worlds), Margaret St. Clair's "Prott," Isaac Asimov's fantasy "Flies," Paul Ernst's somewhat old-fashioned "The Microscopic Giants," Anthony Boucher's time paradox, "The Other Inauguration," Philip K. Dick's "Impostor." Most of them haven't been in book form before, so hard-bound or soft you get the usual Conklin bargain assortment. But—for me—no terror. For that give me something like Fritz Leiber's all-time scrap of nightmare, "Coming Attraction."

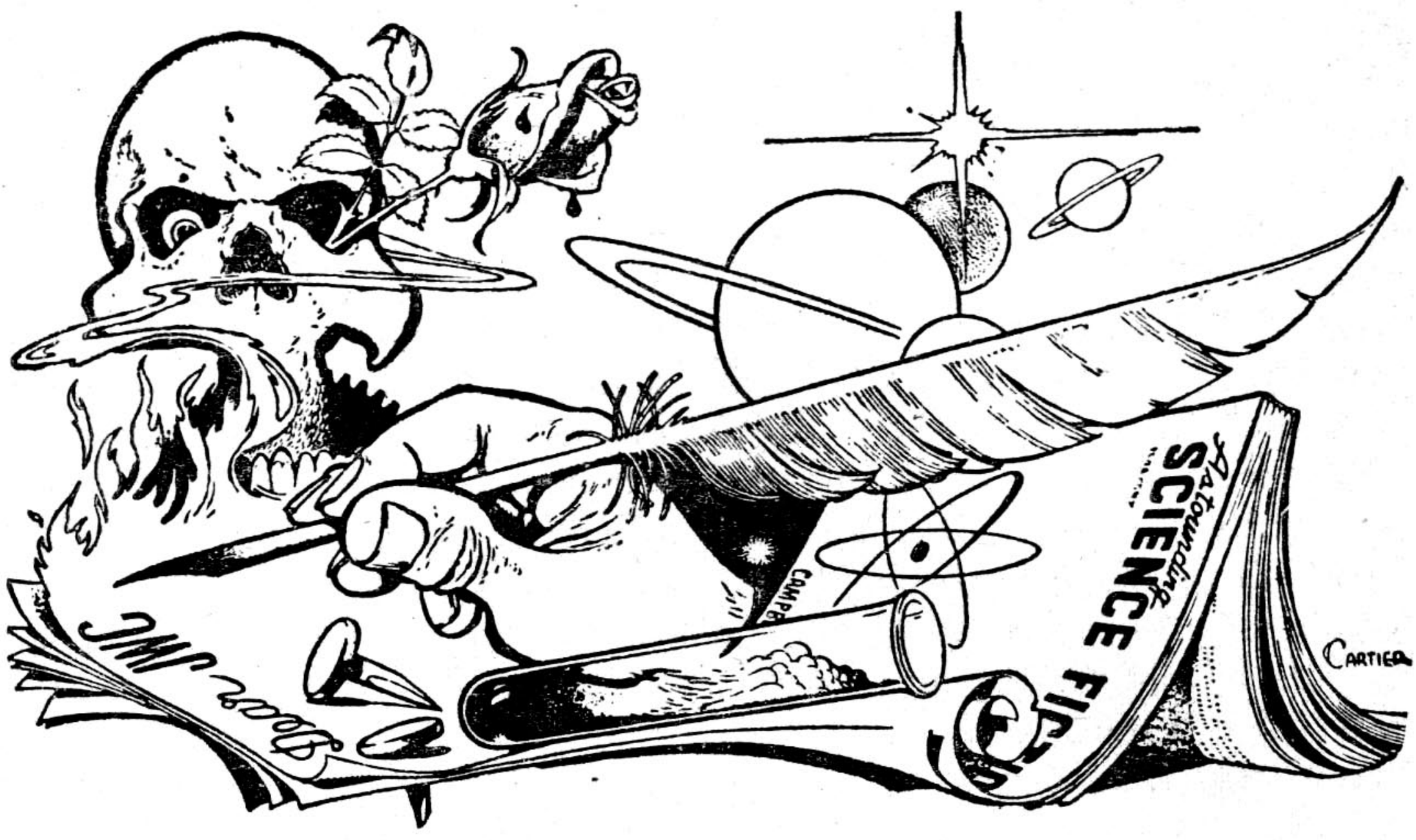
FRONTIERS IN SPACE, edited by Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty. Bantam Books, New York. 1955. 166 pp. 25¢.

Bantam is fast winning itself a reputation for turning out some of the best science fiction paper-backs you'll find anywhere, and this does nothing to weaken that reputation. It's a selection of fourteen short stories from the Bleiler-Dikty "Best" volume for 1951, '52 and '53, and when you remember that with that pair "best" means what the dictionary says, you will understand that this is a sort of *crême de la crême*. I won't say that you or I or the guy down the street might not have selected another set of stories, but there's not a poor one here.

The stories originally came from all over, with *Galaxy* and *F&SF* taking top honors: *Astounding* supplied Alfred Bester's "Oddy and Id" (Oddy Gaul merely wanted to be adored—so everyone had to) and that most touchingly bitter story of future war, Eric Frank Russell's "I Am Nothing." There is A. E. van Vogt with "Process," Bill Brown's "Star Ducks," Damon Knight's tricky little classic "To Serve Man," one of the best of all Bradbury stories in "The Fox in the Forest," Anthony Boucher's "Nine-Finger Jack," "Dark Interlude," by Mack Reynolds and Fredric Brown, "Generation of Noah" by William Tenn, Arthur Porges' "The Rats," Zenna Henderson's first fine story of "the People," "Ararat," Fritz Leiber's "The Moon is Green" (and enticing, over the atomic wastes), John Wyndham's Greek-tragic "Survival," and John W. Jakes' "The Machine."

I suppose you have the three original books—the whole series are essential in any science-fiction library—and these stories are of the caliber that are published over and over in anthologies. But if you are awarding prizes in your local s-f club, or trying to win converts among the outer barbarians, you can afford to give away this little book by the dozen. Do.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



BRASS TACKS

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Once again ASF offers challenging vista down the same intriguing corridor of thought—both in your editorial "Second-Order Logic?", and in the comment to William Q. Nixon's letter in Brass Tacks, concerning the problem of individual-group relationships, and the relationship of mathematics to social problems.

Could it be that sufficient differentiation has not yet been made between man-in-himself on the one hand, and the accumulation of sensory-material neural recepts on the other? From the superficial, piecemeal, statistical method of observation, it is true that the *data* which motivates different individuals does vary enormously, and in proportion to the infinite variables making up each person's life-history. So logic as such could not be blamed for a variance between conclusions—and reactions—which could be better attributed to the variance in the factors to which the logic is applied. (Incidently, how many of us use logic except to justify a reaction which has *already* taken place?)

Perhaps it would help clarify our problem if we disregarded the multitudinous variables in our subject ("man") and undertook to determine what, if any, are the invariant factors common to all members of this "class."

To begin with, what do we accept as a definition of man? Of course a definition is not the same as a de-

scription; electric motors vary widely in size, weight, power, et cetera, but all could be defined as *devices* for changing electrical energy into mechanical motion. In the same sense, what is man for, in terms of function? If we could arrive at such a definition, we would at least know what we were discussing, and could perhaps successfully investigate the mal-functioning of social relationships. Then purely statistical variations in material-sensory recepts would, I believe, be seen as merely incidental. —George L. Cole, 344 Sedgefield Road, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Answer three simple questions:
What am I? What am I doing?
What should I become?

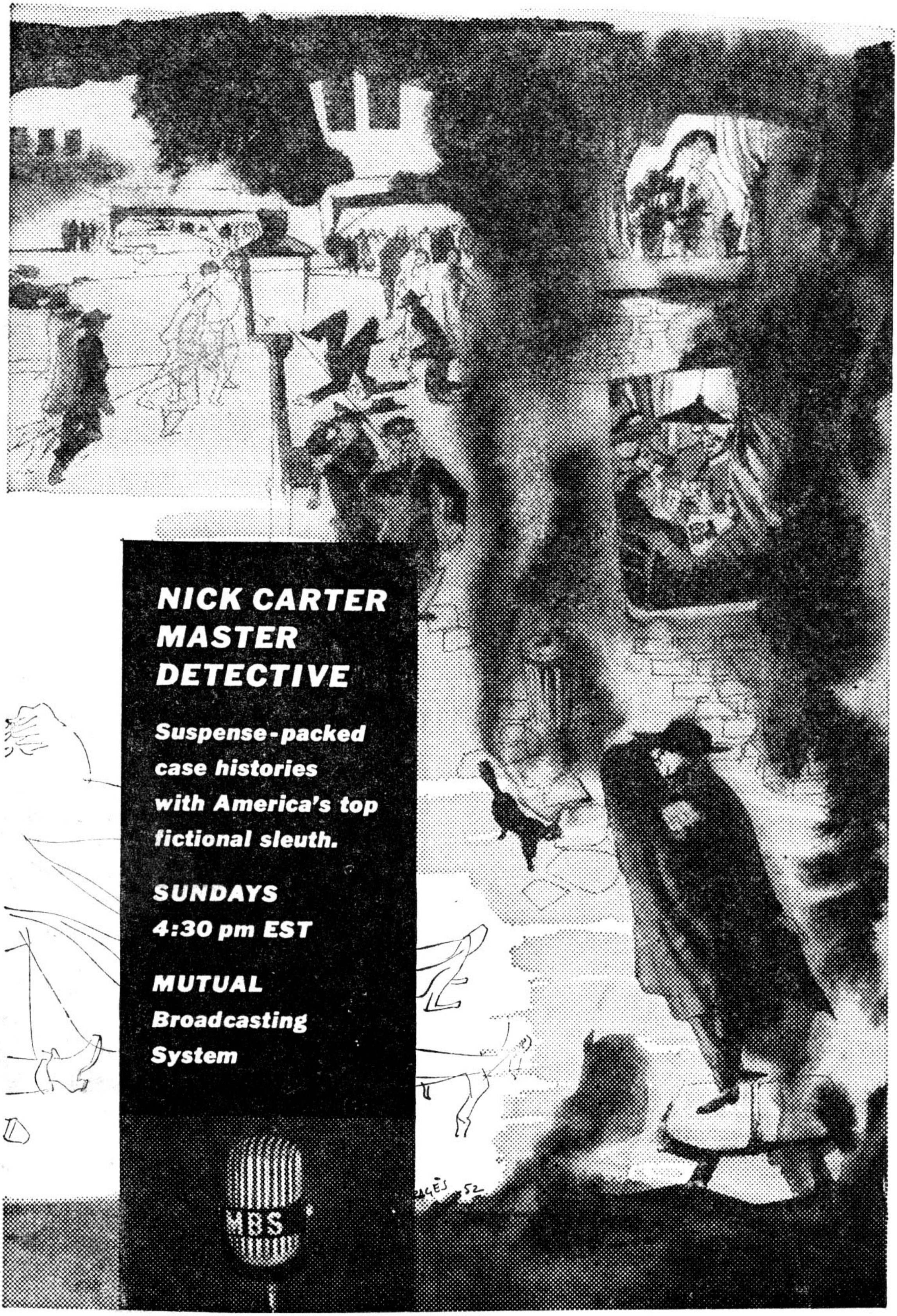
Dear Mr. Campbell:

Re Mr. Miller's introductory comments in June '55 ASF, I would agree that the mechanisms of culture seem to have surpassed the actions of biological evolution in influencing the course of human development (restating the matter a little).

However, I suspect that there will come a time when the mechanism of *cultural* time-binding and evolution will be superseded by improved *individual* psychological functioning. Thus instead of a few men originating new patterns of science and culture, the meticulous transmission and preservation of culture and the training of the young in the patterns, I suspect the future will see the improvement of psychological techniques in such a way that individual creativity will be adequate—in a way that present cultural techniques often are not adequate—for individual and collective human survival. Thus the future human being may learn to think rather than memorize, originate goals rather than accepting them, and creativity may predominate over morality.

It is rather impossible to write sellable stories that could adequately describe such people in their true aspect as sellable stories must appeal to a large number of people—must use as characters a type of person that is similar in emotional and valuational nature to the majority of people who read the magazine; and the emotional conflict must be one that the reader has in himself to some extent—if the hero has an alien type of conflict the story has no interest or meaning for the reader. Insofar as there are probably few persons in existence interested in reading of creative acultural characters, even if there were people who could write such stories, there could be no profitable publication of such stories.

Hence it is likely that the amount of basic human alteration that can be portrayed in stories is limited by the amount of rapport and empathy the current individual can feel for a truly alien type. Although it is possible to feel empathy for a person with similar values and emotional construction, even though the physi-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ognomy, habits, and tools are different, it is quite another thing to feel empathy for a person of a completely different emotional nature, such as an autonomous, acultural person.—Bob Spencer, 4426 Evans Avenue, Oakland 2, California.

But you know—I'll bet quite a good proportion of our readers do in fact have just the problem you considered.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

In my brother's absence from the office today, I'm writing you this letter to explain the situation on "The Long Way Home" ("No World Of Their Own"), by Poul Anderson.

As you know, it's customary for magazine and book rights to a novel to be offered and sold simultaneously, though, of course, the book publisher is told that he cannot schedule publication of the novel until after the magazine's last installment is off the stands. This, as you will recall, was the case with "The Long Way Home"; as a matter of fact, we phoned you to make sure of your on- and off-sale dates in order to assure Ace, the book publisher, of a definite publication date. (Ace had originally told us, incidentally, that they couldn't buy the novel unless they could publish it immediately; we, of course, stated that this was impossible, and provided them with a Philip Dick novel to fill the hole in their scheduling in order to get their agreement to scheduling the book after your last installment was off the stands.)

As you can see, every contingency was covered by this office in order to make sure that everything was all right throughout the deal. We presume that what happened was that a local distributor may have jumped the gun in several localities, releasing the Ace book version, "No World Of Their Own," before the official publication date. Of course, we extend our apologies for the incident, and I'm quite sure that it will never happen again.

In the matter of credit and acknowledgment of the magazine serial use: as a matter of course, we always ask the book publisher to run such a credit line; but we can, of course, only request. The final decision in such a case is up to the publisher; as is the matter of change of title. Both the magazine and book version of "The Long Way Home" were submitted under the same title, and both magazine and book publisher had the option of changing that title.

I hope that this letter straightens the matter out. Once again, please accept our apologies for the mixup. All best wishes.—Sidney Meredith, Vice-President and Treasurer, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

Scott Meredith is Poul Anderson's agent. The above letter is run in Brass Tacks that our readers may know that Poul Anderson, Scott

Meredith, Street & Smith, and Ace Publishers were innocent parties in a mistake that led to something many readers complained about. Best laid plans do "gang aglay." —JWCJr.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

You and other editors have become so locked in the vise of certain strata of fiction that you are filling the pages of the magazines with repeat material over and over. The process follows a certain wheel of presentation. The social examination type of story has become threadbare. There does not seem to be any imagination left in the current crop of authors along this line.

There is a saying, it may be false, that the hungry author is a good author. You, sir, are no doubt proud that you are able to pay your writers a decent rate per word. You should not be. Like most editors you seem to forget that you work for ME.

You have allowed a small group of fans and authors to hoodwink you along with most of your fellow editors into an editorial line that is a truly worked-out claim. There is little good left in it.

I am interested in science fiction. It is not my whole life but it plays an important part in my hours of relaxation. I am sorry to see it reach a static level. I mean, where I can almost predict what your next issue will hold. Somehow, somewhere, your writers have lost their "sense of wonder."

I blame this on you, and others like you. You are in a position that gives you a whip. You buy or you do not buy certain efforts of your authors. You follow this process so carefully that you seem to have reduced the magazine to a math problem or rather the results of one. I am no longer interested in the fact that certain authors are hailed by the fans as a new "someone" or other. I would like to see a new crop of half-starved eager writers arrive in the field. You may then fatten them up if you wish and when they fall into their static state then toss them out and enlist a new crop. I realize that each of the "names" that appear on your contents pages has a certain devoted following, but, does that devoted following make the payments on your bills or is it the great mass of silent customers?

New and budding writers claim that the science-fiction field is too tough to buck, that it is a closed corporation. This I do not believe, but, it *APPEARS* to be. (I am *not,* repeat, *NOT* a frustrated author.) As long as your magazine content continues along the same well worn path and the same old tired stories are re-written by the same old tired authors then to the new and lean boy it APPEARS to be a closed company union.

Sorry if this appears to be a bit harsh . . . but this is the field as I see it. I could be wrong in my contention that your writers are all too fat, but, I don't feel that I am.—Eric von Freihauf, P. O. Box 54, Pullman, Washington.

As you truly say, we work for you —the reader who lays down the cash. Then you, not I, hold the whip. You've said what you don't want. Now tell us this, though! What do you want?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

From time to time you have remarked on the ability of the human brain to process incomplete and incorrect data and still come up with the correct answer. I would like to propose a mechanism for this process. I call it "Extrapolation to Zero." It works like this:

A petroleum chemist wishes to determine the molecular weight of a gasoline sample. It is a well-known fact that gasoline is composed of thousands of hydrocarbons of varying structure and molecular weight. But this doesn't daunt our chemist. He dissolves a bit of the gasoline in benzene and determines the freezing point of the mixture. From this data he calculates the molecular weight of the gasoline as though it were a pure compound. He comes up with an answer that he knows is wrong. So what does he do? He dissolves a larger amount of gasoline in benzene, determines the freezing point and calculates a molecular weight that is further in error than the first determination.

Far from being discouraged, our

chemist uses a still larger sample and comes up with a third answer that is still farther from the truth.

What can he do with three incorrect answers? Well, he plots the apparent molecular weight against the size of the sample he used. The three points fall on a straight line; the larger the sample, the larger the error. He draws a line through the points and extrapolates it to the zero axis. The smaller the sample, the smaller the error and a zero sized sample has a zero answer. So; a correct answer from data known to be incorrect.

Now; postulate a mind receiving incorrect data. This data is fitted into a matrix of experience and an answer is obtained, a wrong answer. The data is fitted into a second different matrix. A second wrong answer is obtained. The data is fittted into a third matrix and a third wrong answer is obtained.

These wrong answers are then plotted against some parameter of the matrices which orders them as to degree of wrongness. The results are extrapolated to zero and presto; right answer from wrong and/or incomplete data.

What do you think?—Maxey Brooke, Box 379, Old Ocean, Texas.

I suspect too many people have an erroneous parameter of wrongness!

EDITORIAL

SUBTLE DISTINCTION

Once upon a time, there was a man who told everybody around him just what they were going to do—and they did it. Everybody hated him, but still everybody did as he said, whether they liked it or not. Many of them felt he had taken away every trace of liberty from them; only a very few felt he was a great and wise man.

Now the above description applies with exactly equal accuracy to an absolute tyrant—and to an accurate prophet. An accurate prophet is a man who can tell you what you're going to do, and you'll do it. A really high-power tyrant can, also, tell you what you're going to do, and see that you do it. The prophet may tell you that you're going to walk out the door and step off a cliff—and, by definition, if he's an accurate prophet, you will, like it or not, do just that. The story has it that Jean Christophe, the Haitian tyrant, ordered some of his soldiers to walk off a cliff—and they did.

Simply observing the facts—how can one distinguish the prophet from the tyrant? In a dice game, if a man turns out to be betting, with remarkable uniformity, on the roll that actually comes up, he will most certainly be accused of using loaded dice—he's somehow controlling the roll of what is supposed to be an uncontrolled, random system.

But maybe he simply has precognition that works. Is it ethical for a man to use precognition, if it's unethical to control the dice? For that matter, is it ethical for a man to use psychokinesis—if he can!—when it's unethical to use iron slugs and electromagnets?

A man can get himself most cordially disliked by following in exact detail the precise recommendations of Society, and actually achieving what the Society holds is ideal. That

is, if a man studies hard and conscientiously, thinks clearly and wisely, and learns from everyone who can teach him a useful lesson, then disciplines himself rigorously to use and apply that knowledge, he will most certainly *not* get the reward Society suggests he will. He'll get the reward of cordial dislike. Why? Because men hate to have their freedom of choice taken from them; they hate a tyrant, unless they are what Aristotle called "born slaves."

For let's do some straight, honest thinking on the results of fulfilling Society's ideals. A man who has learned a great deal, and studied widely and intensely, who thinks with rigorous honesty, without self-deception, will get straight answers to most of the problems that are solvable. Obviously, if he has worked harder, longer, and more honestly at thinking things through, he will be able to solve accurately and swiftly problems that less disciplined individuals can approximate only vaguely and inaccurately. If he has accepted, without self-deception, that he, too, is inexorably compelled to obey the fundamental laws of the Universe, then he will recognize clearly that those Universe laws will apply rigorously to every individual in the Universe—willy-nilly, like-it-or-not, everyone will, in fact, comply with them. They're not like man-made laws; you *can't* break a Universe law. True, there are systems that apply the Law of Compensation; by applying the laws of aerodynamics, you can secure immunity to the direct, simple effects of the Law of Gravity—but you do that by first acknowledging *in full* the absolute existence of gravitic effects, not by breaking the law of gravity.

The prophet, then, can say, "If you do X, you will obtain consequence Y. Unless you want Y, you cannot do X." To a man who does not accept the reality of the Universe

law involved, the prophet sounds suspiciously like a dogmatic, tyrannical, would-be ruler. It sounds as though he is trying to abrogate the individual's right to live his own life as he chooses. The prophet may sound like a benevolent tyrant—but still a tyrant, and, therefore, hated.

The old saying "Knowledge shall set you free," contains a joker. It may set you free of some things—but it also forces you to realize you are *not* as free as you thought you were. Before the knowledge of the Law of Conservation of Mass-Energy was available, such ideas as the self-filling magic purse seemed reasonable, if not available at the moment. But knowledge of that law, once gained, means that you must acknowledge the problem's a lot more complex than it seemed.

Let a man do precisely as the Society says he should to be an ideal man, and as Mark Clifton pointed out in his story, "What Have I Done?", people will hate him. He *appears* to limit your freedom because his cogent advice is valid.

The man who says, with violent and intense pressure, "You've got to accept what I say! You must believe me, and do what I tell you!" arouses a strong resentment. He's trying to be a dictator, and he's promptly resisted *because* he's trying to dictate. What he's dictating may in fact be exactly what you had in mind doing all along—but not now, you won't! The very fact that he is trying to force you to do it is cause enough for your rejection of it.

Hm-m-m . . . but suppose you know a man who, over the last five years, in thousands of large and small instances, has been an accurate predictor of results of actions. He's been right at least ninety-eight per cent of the time, and the two per cent is simply doubtful. The sort of man who, when you challenge a word he uses, points to the dictionary, where his use proves to be an accurate, though less common use. One who states an improbable-sounding fact, and, invariably, proves to be disgustingly accurate.

Now this man says, quite mildly and off-handedly: "You know, it seems to me that if you do X, you'll get Y as a result. I may be wrong, of course, but that's my feeling."

No super-salesman, no would-be dictator, can put that much pressure behind his statement; the pressure behind that is that *you know* he's almost invariably correct. *You* know it—internally. The pressure is your own, internal recognition that this man is irritatingly, frustratingly, maddeningly *right*. And you don't *want* him to be right, dammit!

O. K.—let's switch to the prophet's viewpoint for a while. Of course, he's not without honor, save in his own country; he makes prophecies to and about his own countrymen, and the accuracy of the prophecies can be observed quite calmly by distant and emotionally uninvolved aliens, who are much interested in his unusual abilities. His countrymen, directly affected, hate him *because* he's right.

The prophet wouldn't have worked that hard trying to understand the Universe he lives in if he didn't enjoy the process of learning; for him, learning, wondering, and learning more is a fine, stimulating, satisfying exercise. He no more wants to stop learning than a tree wants to stop growing. Sure it's hard work—and he will, like Edison, work at it some twenty hours a day because it's so satisfying. He'll let anybody teach him ideas. (And if you don't want him to happily set to work analyzing your ideas, don't offer them to him for his inspection!) He's interested in everything, and keeps trying to compare every idea he has with every new idea—and an idea that "he has" means any idea that anyone, at any time, has made him interested in. He's quite unconcerned with where any idea came from—whether it was his originally, or someone offered it to him. To him, the important thing is the idea. He works hard, cogently, and efficiently at learning during all his waking time; he spends his sleep organizing what he's learned at a subconscious level. All with the greatest enthusiasm, and enjoyment.

It is his type that, in seeking to satisfy curiosity about the nature and structure of pain, runs knitting needles into his own body—carefully sterilized, of course—and gets thorough satisfaction from the experiment. He's not a masochist; it's simply necessary to obtain experimental data. (Of course, he may find it necessary to perform similar experiments on animals; he isn't going to be so well-loved by the animals, understandably.)

He knows the importance of learning; his major error will tend to be assuming that it's obvious that learning is important.

He enjoys getting new, and useful ideas from any source, and studying the idea for possible inclusion in his system of understandings. Naturally, he supposes anyone else would enjoy it, so, following the Golden Rule, he happily offers his new ideas to anyone who'll stand still, can be immobilized, or doesn't succeed in running faster than he can.

Because he constantly learns new ideas, and every new idea produces a shift of values in the whole system of his ideas, his neighbors and

friends find that he is remarkably inconsistent — he keeps changing the nature of the idea he's apparently trying to sell. Last week's enthusiasm for A seems to have been entirely forgotten, in this week's enthusiasm about B—which will, no doubt, be forgotten next week.

It isn't forgotten, of course; he's no longer enthusiastically learning new and wonderful facts about grammar school geography, but he hasn't forgotten them—characteristically, he has an infuriatingly perfect memory—nor does he consider them invalid, worthless, or unimportant. It's just that, like any organism, he's most concerned about new growth.

He's aware that people don't like his facts, nor his answers. But—what should he do? Please them by making mistakes to keep them happy? He can, of course, conscientiously and kindly lay out a careful plan of making certain types of errors, so that he'll be less disturbing—which, if anyone around him discovers, will cause their irritation and frustration, to be redoubled as acute distrust and anger at being treated like children.

Now it is a fact well known and well authenticated by many anthropologists that Man can run down such remarkably adept runners as deer and antelope. Not by speed, of course, but by sheer ability to persist toward a goal beyond the ability of any lower animal. The "span of attention," so to speak, is so much greater in Man that Man can, for a dinner, maintain an effort longer, at a higher average level of intensity, than a deer can for life itself.

There *is* a difference between individuals; Einstein, certainly, could maintain an intensity and level of attention longer, by far, than any normal human being could. A moron can't achieve the intensity-time quotient of attention that a normal human being can.

This may be a subtle difference between human individuals—but it can cause a vast amount of misunderstanding and tension. It's as subtle as the difference between tyrant and prophet—the difference between a dictated command and a dedicated prediction. But it's a very real and important distinction.

THE EDITOR.

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